

Myrna Loy ~ 46 Films and more



Myrna Loy was born Myrna Adele Williams on 2 August 1905 in Radersburg, Montana to parents of Welsh, Scottish and Swedish descent. After her rancher father David became, at just 21, the youngest man ever elected to the Montana State Legislature, the family moved 35 miles to Helena, the state capital, which is where Myrna grew up. Frank (later Gary) Cooper, four years her senior, was a near neighbour:

We lived high off the hog on Fifth Avenue. It was just a nice middle-class neighbourhood. Most of the richer families were building on the opposite mountainside. Helena is a spacious city, climbing up Mount Ascension and Mount Helena from Last Chance Gulch, so we had wonderful, steep streets. When it snowed you could slide past Judge Cooper's house all the way to the railroad station in the valley part of town. The Coopers lived just below us in a fairly elegant house with an iron fence around it.¹

In 1918 a flu pandemic swept the world, and one of its countless victims was 39 year old David Williams. This prompted his widow Ella to move with children Myrna and nine year old David to Los Angeles. There Myrna attended the Westlake School for Girls where at the age of 15 she caught the acting bug. In 1924-5, she came to the attention of silver screen big-hitters Rudolph and Natacha Valentino, following which doors of opportunity began to open.

Her first film, released in 1925, was *What Price Beauty?* Later the same year she appeared alongside young Joan Crawford in *Pretty Ladies*. Her first starring

role was in *Bitter Apples* (1927). Loy was one of the minority of established silent players able to make a successful transition into the sound era. Early in her career, she was frequently cast as an exotic *femme fatale*. Her characters later became more sophisticated and wholesome. She worked under contract at Warner Brothers until 1933, before moving upmarket to MGM.

Among her first MGM films were *The Prizefighter And The Lady* (1933) and *The Thin Man* (1934) - a huge success and her first of fourteen outings with William Powell. Loy called *The Thin Man* the movie "that finally made me - after more than 80 films."² By 1936, Loy was popular enough to be named in a nationwide poll Queen of the Movies (Clark Gable was King) and for the next five years, until the USA entered WWII in December 1941, her star remained firmly in the ascendant.

After wartime service as a Red Cross administrator, Myrna returned to the screen with intermittent success - *The Best Years Of Our Lives* (1946); *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* (1948) - but without ever quite reclaiming her former elite standing. As years passed, choice parts all but dried up as producers and directors looked for talent - mainly *younger* talent - elsewhere. Between 1960's *Midnight Lace* and her next film *The April Fools* stretched a nine year gap, though, from the mid-fifties on, occasional TV parts were also coming her way. Like her near contemporary Barbara Stanwyck, with whom she never played, Myrna continued to act into her late seventies. By the time she passed away on 14 December 1993, at the age of 88, she had scored an impressive 129 motion picture credits.



Between 1936 and 1960 Myrna Loy was married and divorced four times. She had no children. From 1960 until her death in 1993 she lived in a Manhattan apartment block. She made her Broadway debut in a revival of Clare Booth Luce's *The Women* in April 1973 at the age of 67. Though never Oscar nominated, she did receive an honorary Lifetime Achievement Award in 1991. She is buried in her home town of Helena, Montana.

Myrna Loy

So Perfect in Her Way, It Almost Seems We Imagined Her

Chicago, 1934: John Dillinger, Public Enemy No. 1, goes down full of bullets outside the Biograph Theater. The papers say he was betrayed by a "lady in red." Actually he was betrayed by Myrna Loy. Dillinger, a big fan of hers, had crept out of hiding to see her latest picture, Manhattan Melodrama. As he was leaving the theater, G-men got him. Cause of death: love of Loy.

Interesting that Dillinger, bank robber and killer, was also a bellwether of popular taste. Myrna Loy wasn't even a big star then. She didn't become one until several months later when she bewitched America in The Thin Man, in which she and William Powell played the jaunty husband-and-wife detective team Nick and Nora Charles. What an entrance she makes: hauled into a nightclub by a dog on a leash, spilling Christmas presents, sprawling, sliding across the floor. So debonair, moments later, bantering with Powell over drinks. So soignée the next morning, wearing a mink and an ice bag. After The Thin Man she was enshrined in the nation's heart as "the perfect wife."

"I hate that label," says Loy, 82.

A lady full of soft humour, Myrna Loy doesn't hate much else. Oysters maybe.

"The climax of The Thin Man," she says, "the dinner table scene where Bill unravels the plot, took a long time to shoot. Bill had trouble with all those lines. Well, they kept serving the same oysters over and over again, and finally under those hot lights they putrefied. I couldn't look at an oyster for ages after that."

She is sitting in her pleasant Manhattan apartment overlooking the East River, a blond-wood cane beside her. Her autobiography, Myrna Loy: Being and Becoming, has recently been published. Co-author James Kotsilibas-Davis is seated nearby. As she tells the oyster story, you're struck by her hearty chuckle. And distracted by her nose. There it is, the most famous nose of the '30s, the sleek, sassy nose that sent hordes of women to plastic surgeons for copies.

Élan fills her films of the '30s and '40s, the ones with Gable, Tracy and Cary Grant, but especially the ones with Powell. The two starred together 14 times, more than any other team on the screen. Throughout, Myrna Loy is as smooth as a brandy-laced eggnog. Very sexy too, with her marvellous voice, like a hoarse flute. She has a way of eyeing leading men with a gravely elfin look. No wonder that after The Thin Man, Men Must Marry Myrna clubs popped up all

over the country. Nick and Nora Charles! There hadn't been a marriage like it since the Hotspurs, certainly not in a Hollywood film.

Today, Loy's movies are popular all over again because the kind of wife she played all her career - the spirited equal - is an '80s ideal. As director Alan Pakula (Klute, Sophie's Choice) says:

She didn't do the lone, dominant woman - the Bette Davis / Joan Crawford thing - but she was certainly post-feminist in terms of the characters she played. In the Powell-Loy pictures, the relationship between those two was as deep and as alive and as true as in any complicated story about a marriage I think you can have. And she was a working, collaborative wife. To young guys today, that's the fantasy American woman. They want to marry bright women with minds of their own, careers of their own, wit, sexuality. Women who are a match. Myrna always had that. At the same time you always felt she really cared about her man in some very simple way. But there's nobody like her in the movies today. I recently wrote a screenplay about marriage and when I finished I thought: "Well, Myrna Loy in 1940, she'd be wonderful. I wish..." I'm still looking for Myrna Loy.

"Storm's coming," says Loy, pointing to a couple of bruise-coloured clouds over the river.

No rain is forecast.

"I'd believe her," says her biographer, Kotsilibas-Davis. "She's from Montana. She knows the sky."

A mountain girl, she was born Myrna Williams in 1905 and reared on a ranch. Myrna [of Irish origin] was the name of a whistle-stop her father noticed from a train. Loy was a noise suggested 20 years later by a Russian she knew who liked the sound-poems of Gertrude Stein.

When Loy was a youngster, her family moved to Helena, where one of the neighbours was a kid named Gary Cooper. Some 75 years later, Loy recalls how they once grubbed around in a cellar looking for a jar of apple jelly. Kotsilibas-Davis says it's too bad she and Cooper never did a film together. "Oh, I don't know," says Loy. "Gary wasn't funny enough, and I wasn't serious enough, so what could we have done?"

After her father died in the influenza epidemic of 1918, her mother moved the family to California, outside Hollywood. By now Myrna was turning into a quaint, copper-haired beauty, mad for the dance. Her first job out of high

school was cavorting in pageants at Grauman's Egyptian Theater. Then Rudolph Valentino plucked her out of the chorus and gave her a screen test; since life doesn't imitate 42nd Street, she failed it.

Soon, though, her beauty began to get her parts - little parts, like "a hedonist" in Ben-Hur (1925). Producers were both entranced and baffled by her, by something about the tilt of her eyes. The future symbol of all-American womanhood served a zany apprenticeship: nine years playing mostly Asian vamps.

Fah Lo See, Nubi, Yasmini, Narita - Myrna played them all. So expert did she become playing ladies of the Sino-sinuous sinful sort that Irving Thalberg tried to cast her as an evil trapeze star who marries and murders a midget for money in the still notorious shock film Freaks. That she managed to avoid.

Sprinkled here and there were better roles, such as Ronald Colman's mistress in Arrowsmith (1931). At last, after more than 80 films, director W.S. Van Dyke spied in her a saucy Caucasian and cast her in The Thin Man.

In her autobiography, Loy tells tangy tales of her glory years as a movie star, after her first marriage to producer Arthur Hornblow in 1936, living in the Hollywood Hills. Lots of chic escapades: capturing and feasting on her landlord's peacock; attending a famous full-dress Mozart party; pulling diminutive composer Jerome Kern out of a pot on her porch (he had climbed inside to hide and got stuck). She discusses the films, too, including her several hits with Clark Gable, such as Wife vs. Secretary and Too Hot To Handle. In 1936, after a nationwide poll, columnist Ed Sullivan of the New York Daily News crowned Gable and Loy King and Queen of the Movies. Today she likes to recall romancing Gable on a farmhouse porch in Test Pilot - an especially charged love scene, she says, because they never touch. Still, Loy doesn't mind admitting The King's shortcomings. "Oh, Clark was a terrible actor," she says. "He couldn't act his way out of a bag."

Aside from one provocative remark - A lot of girls who later became stars used to slip over the border for wild weekends with the President of Mexico - there's not much sex in Loy's book. Unless you count thwarted passion. Her relationship with Powell was devoted and platonic, but she fended off quite a few others: Barrymore, Gable, Tracy, even art historian Bernard Berenson. ("Come into the garden and hear my nightingales ...")

Loy didn't do all the rejecting. "I had a big crush on Tyrone Power," she says. "It didn't do me any good." And she had a thing for a man she never met: FDR. She was Roosevelt's favourite actress. "We carried on a long-distance infatuation throughout the war," Loy remembers, as light rain patters at the window. "He was always sending me telegrams, trying to get me to come to

Washington. But I could never go when he was there. The times I did get there, he was gone. It's a very sad story." She thinks it over. "Probably very lucky."

*After the war came what was perhaps Loy's finest work, in William Wyler's Academy Award-sweeping *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946). In this one, Loy brings dark new melodies to "the perfect wife." First, her soldier husband, played by Fredric March, arrives home in a poignant reunion scene. Later, Teresa Wright, as their daughter, accuses her parents of never having "had any trouble of any kind." Turning to her husband, Loy responds: "We never had any trouble. How many times have I told you I hated you and believed it in my heart? How many times have you said you were sick and tired of me, that we were all washed up? How many times have we had to fall in love all over again?"*

In real life, Loy has been four times married - to Hornblow, tycoon John Hertz, writer Gene Markey and diplomat Howland Sargeant - and four times divorced. Having grown up believing a wife should be not just perfect but "Oriental," as she puts it, she was caught between trying to excel in that role and pursuing a major career. She had a talent for love but not for marriage - at least, marriage as it was viewed at the time.

An actor friend tells the story of discovering her at a luncheon talking to Elizabeth Taylor and Ava Gardner. Those two were lucky, Loy was telling them, to have been born in a generation that didn't stigmatize unmarried women. They should consider the single life.

"She was there all the way, no defecting to Bobby Kennedy or anything," says former Senator Eugene McCarthy, recalling his 1968 presidential campaign. "Myrna was there all the time, bearing witness, testifying, showing up."

*Loy worked hard for McCarthy, to stop the Vietnam war, and before that, in '52 and '56, for Adlai Stevenson. A granddaughter of pioneers, with a flinty libertarian streak, she has been a lifelong activist - outré behaviour in a star of her day. But as Burt Reynolds, who directed her in his 1978 black comedy *The End* says: "The world has been more important to Myrna than her career. She could always see beyond Hollywood's city limits."*

*In the '30s she feared Hitler early. While dining on peacocks, she was reading *Mein Kampf*. When she wondered aloud why blacks were always given servants' roles - Why not, she suggested, show a black man carrying a briefcase up courthouse steps? - she created a hubbub in Hollywood. She was the first major star to buck the studios in a contract dispute. The issue: equal pay for equal work. She was making half what William Powell was, didn't like it and quit work for nearly a year until MGM capitulated.*

During World War II she worked full-time for the Red Cross. "It's astonishing to think," says Roddy McDowall, a close friend, "that at the peak of her success, she quit acting. She made only one film during World War II, devoted her entire time to the war effort. It was like she went into the service."

In the late '40s, her film career rekindled, she made two fine comedies with Cary Grant (The Bachelor And The Bobby Soxer and Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House) and became the perfect mother in Cheaper By The Dozen with Clifton Webb. But political action was filling her life. She fought the Communist witch-hunt in Hollywood. Then she became deeply involved in UNESCO, giving speeches for world peace. When her film career wound down (in the '50s she was playing two-scene alcoholics, dotty aunts), she found success touring in plays. In 1960 she campaigned for John Kennedy ("His staff said I got Syracuse for him almost single-handedly"). Later, in California, she did battle with Governor Ronald Reagan over open-housing legislation and for years afterward was a vigorous member of the National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing.

The Reagan revolution sits on her like an anvil. "It's a mystery to me why a lot of people don't want Democrats. When I was growing up, it was all Democrats. We wouldn't let a Republican in the back door."

Another mystery: how, like Vanessa Redgrave, she always managed to keep the hard angles of politics out of her work. How many social reformers could say they regret never having worked with Fred Astaire "because we were so much alike"?

Now luminous activist Loy is the latest thing. Recently a big new revival house opened on 57th Street in New York. It's called (shades of Dillinger) The Biograph, perfect showcase for her fatal fascination. The theater's inaugural program, now running, is the films of Powell and Loy. Maybe the screen romance endures because, devoted as they are to each other, they always treat their love wryly, as a strange enthusiasm. The same way Loy confides in Libeled Lady (1936), "I'm mad about frogs."

Pope Brock, People Magazine, 4 April 1988

Sources

¹ Gary Cooper, *American Hero* by Jeffrey Meyers, William Morrow, 1998, page 6

² *Myrna Loy: Being and Becoming* by James Kotsilibas-Davis and Myrna Loy, Knopf, 1987, page 88

Happy Birthday, Myrna Loy

(Posted by blogger The Siren on 2 August 2011)

... The discussion centred on racist images in classic films, and how much, or even whether, we need to protect impressionable children from them. And it made the Siren think of Loy, who made no excuses for the sins of her era, but rather owned up to her mistakes:

... Those exotic [roles] started to predominate. My bit as a mulatto in The Heart Of Maryland led to a role that I'm very much ashamed of. Zanuck wrote Ham And Eggs At The Front, a parody of What Price Glory?, casting me as a spy. How could I ever have put on blackface? When I think of it now, it horrifies me. Well, our awareness broadens, thank God! It was a tasteless slapstick comedy that I mercifully remember very little of.



Loy recognized what was behind her "Oriental" phase, didn't like it, but was still able to be scathingly funny about it. After *Love Me Tonight* (she knew that was a good one - Miss Loy was very smart about most of her roles), she wrote:

They dropped me right back into the vamp mould, loaning me to RKO for Thirteen Women. As a Javanese-Indian half-caste, I methodically murder all the white schoolmates who've patronized me. I recall little about that racist concoction, but it came up recently when the National Board of Review honoured me with its first Career Achievement Award. Betty Furness, a charming mistress of ceremonies, who had started at RKO doubling for my hands in close-ups when I was busy elsewhere, said that she'd been dropped from Thirteen Women. (Despite its title, there were only ten in the final

print.) "You were lucky," I told her, "because I just would have killed you, too. The only one who escaped me in that picture was Irene Dunne and I regretted it every time she got the parts I wanted."

Thirteen Women is actually quite an interesting pre-Code ... Despite the stereotypical spooky powers that are presumed to be congenital for an Asian beauty, Loy's character goes bad because she's a victim of racism. She is turning her treatment back on her tormentors. But it is easy to see why Loy would lack patience for yet another evil exotic.

On screen Loy was a byword for sophistication. Off screen, like Nora Charles, she combined that quality with broadmindedness and old-fashioned common sense. Immediately after *Thirteen Women*, Loy did *The Mask Of Fu Manchu* and found herself confronted with a script that asked her to whip a man "while uttering gleefully suggestive sounds." She'd had it with this sort of stuff, and furthermore she'd been reading Freud and picked up a thing or two. She went to producer Hunt Stromberg and refused to film it: "I've done a lot of terrible things in films, but this girl's a sadistic nymphomaniac." Stromberg said, "What's that?" ... Loy replied, "Well, you better find out, because that's what she is and I won't play her that way." Studio contracts being what they were, she did play her that way, but she succeeded in getting Stromberg to trim some excesses. "She wasn't Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm," said Miss Loy, "but, as I remember, she just watched while others did the whipping."

... Filming that scene brought out an example of just how much Loy's co-workers must have loved her:

After I was safely submerged in a sunken marble tub, they scattered rose petals on the water, stationing men to keep them circulating with long, toothless rakes. They keep pushing those rose petals closer and closer to cover me - somewhat overzealously, it seemed. I looked up and saw a ring of familiar faces, Culver City friends and neighbours who worked in the studio. Unaware that I wore flesh-toned garments, they were diligently trying to protect the virtue of a local girl. It was so sweet, but didn't work. Some magazine photographer got in, took a picture that made me look stark naked and syndicated it all over the world.

Last night, of course, the Siren wanted to watch a Myrna Loy movie, and she did: 1940's *Third Finger, Left Hand*, a nicely titled Robert Z. Leonard comedy with Melvyn Douglas. It isn't much more than diverting, but the role is a bit unusual for Loy, in that her character is a career woman who has invented a phony husband in order to avoid getting hit on at work. Without a husband, the CEO's jealous wife would push her out in a matter of months; with a ring on her finger, she can do her job. And the CEO's wife? "We're pals," says Loy.

In most of my pictures I complemented the male character, who usually carried the story. This often meant that my roles were subordinate, but that's the way I wanted it. The Bette Davis type of classic woman's role wasn't for me, nor was the Roz Russell female executive routine, which is what I did in Third Finger, Left Hand.

She liked Melvyn Douglas ("He was a great person, a tireless fighter for liberal causes," noted Loy) and their comic rhythms are very much in tune, even if one inevitably misses William Powell. The Siren would tell you to watch this movie just for a scene where Loy fakes a tough tootsie from Brooklyn persona to embarrass Douglas. She pulls her gum out of her mouth in a string - if that doesn't sell you, it should. There's also her white evening gown in a nightclub scene, and her fake wedding night with Melvyn Douglas; Miss Loy being carried unwillingly over the threshold shows she could do physical comedy as well as she did repartee.

The Siren read [Loy's autobiography] *Being and Becoming* when it first came out in 1987, picks it up all the time to this day, and still recalls many passages without much effort, as you can see. She already adored Miss Loy - from *The Thin Man* on, there is scarcely a movie the Siren wouldn't be in clover watching, and there's a good deal to worship before that watershed film, too. But Loy's memoirs are special, because they show such a rare thing - an artist whose work means the world to you, whom you can also admire as a person. Not a saint, oh no - wouldn't Miss Loy have hooted at that? - but a woman anyone would have been privileged to have as a co-worker, proud to have as a friend.

And so, last night, watching *Third Finger, Left Hand*, the Siren was struck by the character of Sam, a Pullman porter played by African-American actor Ernest Whitman. Whitman, though stuck with what passed for black dialect in Hollywood, 1940, presents an unusual and charming character, neither shuffling nor particularly servile, just genial and polite. And when Melvyn Douglas needs a lawyer ... it turns out that Sam has been studying law. He proceeds to run rings around Loy's toney attorney and would-be fiancé, Lee Bowman, quoting hilariously abstruse passages from case law until Bowman calls it a night. Sam's character is the one who paves the way for true love to prevail. And when the end credits rolled, the Siren marched straight back to Loy's book, and this:

During my early years in the studios, movie people were too busy getting a foothold to concern themselves with social conscience. I once asked, "Why does every Negro in a film have to play a servant? How about just a black person walking up the steps of a courthouse carrying a briefcase?" Well! The storm that caused!

When artists die, there are always some scolds who insist that it simply isn't possible to miss - deeply, personally miss - a woman you were never fortunate enough to meet. The Siren says phooey to that. Because she misses Myrna Loy, and always will.

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No More *Chinese*, Myrna?

Well, since it ends your secret sorrow, here's luck! We're for you after The Animal Kingdom.

Openings never see her. Swanky parties never see her. Brown Derbies never see her. Not because she is retiring or just too exclusive for words, my deah. Heavens no. She's just not interested.

But - and is she smart? - movie devotees see her. By scores of thousands. And that's why, after seven years of movie making, she's still going strong. Stronger than that, in fact.

Some twenty years ago little Myrna Williams - the Loy is merely a movie name - lived on Fifth Avenue in Helena, Montana, and right on the next street lived a tall, sober-faced little boy whose name was Cooper. Frank, his folks called him. And Mrs. Williams used to call on Mrs. Cooper and discuss the weather, the Ladies' Aid meeting, Frank's tonsils and Myrna's dancing lessons, little dreaming that one day Frank would be Gary, the Hollywood heartbreaker, and Myrna the best Chinese menace that ever came out of Montana.

When Myrna was seven her father died and the family moved to Santa Monica, California. And was she a comical-looking kid those days, with her bright carrot hair and masses and masses of freckles? Big? And gawky? Well, the kids in the neighbourhood nearly passed out when Myrna insisted she'd be a movie actress.

But mother had looked beneath the freckles and gawkiness and wasn't so sure. Not so sure that perhaps that little oval face, those full-lidded green eyes, that gaily tilted nose might not mean a thing or two some day.

And mother was right.

Myrna went in for dancing and finally, in her 'teens, landed in a Sid Grauman prologue at the Egyptian Theatre. Her photograph, with a dozen others, stood in the lobby. One day a dark-haired, dark-eyed young man glimpsed that face. And stopped. Valentino, if you please, was interested.

He looked her up and had her tested for a part in one of his pictures. Too young. But Mrs. Valentino (Natacha Rambova) was so enchanted she offered a small part in her own picture, *What Price Beauty?*

The picture was a classic flop. But it started Myrna Loy in the movies, and she's been going right along since then - nursing a growing passionate purpose.

This one great, flaming desire is to get away from Oriental roles. For years she fought against it, and it did no good.

Perhaps it's because she achieves that Oriental look so readily that they constantly keep thrusting her into those parts. Her eyes, remember, do not slant and are no narrower than Swanson's. But - and here's the secret - the lids are full. Her eyes do not seem to rest back in their sockets as other people's do. So, with a mere dash of a pencil near the corners and a wig, she looks more like Sin Toy than Sin Toy herself.



Yes, when we see you a l'Americienne, Myrna, we see a great future. Still, we see too why they kept you "East of Suez" so long. Just a touch on those eyes and, oh! what a daughter to Fu Manchu you made! Who can do that now, we ask you?

But here's the strange and weird part of it. The thing has retarded her career. Exactly as though some strange, mystic force were holding her back.

It has even thrust itself into her personal life. At a theatre the other evening, Myrna and a friend were suddenly conscious of an earnest conversation behind them. Imagine her surprise when a voice piped in: "Yes, Myrna Loy is Chinese. You see, our Chinese laundry man lives next door to her people ..."

Shock number two: a member of the RKO Radio publicity staff came dashing into her dressing room the other day. "Look," he said, "I just won ten

bucks. At noon today a fellow bet me ten dollars that it wasn't *you* in the commissary. Swore you were a half-caste Chinese woman. When I proved it was you, he nearly passed out with surprise. But he paid up!"

So you see! Yet Myrna Loy is about as alluringly exotic off the screen as Aunt Het with the lumbago. You'd expect her perfumes to be heavy and passionately Siamish. Actually she wears a light woodsy scent for daytime and a nice, spicy one for evening.

She lives with her mother, her aunt and her brother, in a nice but unpretentious home in Beverly Hills. And works harder and plays less than any ten working girls put together.

Publicity departments wash their hands of Myrna completely. What can you say of a girl who lives normally and doesn't think being a movie actress calls for hoo-cha-cha and a bun on [i.e. high jinks and being drunk] at the May-fair? Myrna is bad copy, knows it, and doesn't know what to do about it.



She has never been to New York. San Francisco is the farthest she's travelled from Hollywood since leaving Montana. She is constantly surrounded by travel catalogues and steamship literature, but every time she plans to go somewhere, Hollywood needs her. In fact, she had her trunks packed for Hawaii when they called her back for retakes on *Emma*. So she sent her kid brother.

And it was that small role of a normal but unsympathetic American girl in *Emma* which first gave her hope. Then along came *Thirteen Women* with Myrna playing as nasty a Javanese female as ever lived. And she played it beautifully. But it put her right back where she started from.

Then, three cheers for our side, she got that grand little bit in Chevalier's *Love Me Tonight*. A humorous little tidbit that Myrna made sit up on its hind feet and bark. Letters from film-goers poured in. Now, she thought, they know I'm an actress and not a frozen-faced Oriental slinking around doing dirt.

But you know what happened. *The Mask Of Fu Manchu*.

Still, if Hollywood can smack you down harder than you've ever been smacked before, it can also suddenly lift you to heights never dreamed of. See what it did to Myrna. It took her right out of the depths of the *Fu Manchu* business and waltzed her into the refined and cultured midst of Leslie Howard, Ann Harding and *The Animal Kingdom*. Presto, chango. Just like that.

If you saw *The Animal Kingdom*, you know what Myrna did with that role of *Cecilia*, the society wife with a heart like a block of ice and a figure like Patou's bewitchingest model.

With all due apologies to Ann Harding followers, Myrna marched that lovely, scheming hypocrite straight up to first place for female honours.

Oh, she was a siren all right, all right. But this time a siren whom, alas, one meets in every third "social register" home. The respectable wife who uses her sorcery as coldly as any money-mad mistress. In brief, Myrna played that nasty, unsympathetic part - and practically stole the show!

She kept her fingers crossed and held her breath when the picture was over. Another Chinaman next, as sure as you live, she thought.

But no. Instead, they handed her a smock. And not only a smock, but John Barrymore as well. So Myrna and John Barrymore are cavorting about in *Topaze*, the realest, grandest part she's had yet. Not an exotic, heartless Siamese something or other; not even a cruel, modern, unsympathetic woman, but a part that is exactly like Myrna herself. Enjoying life, knowing it's not all the berries, but making the best of it. Such is Myrna in *Topaze*.

Now we'll see what happens. We'll all just sit back and see.

Jeanne North, *Photoplay*, April, 1933

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DON JUAN (1926)



This 116 minute silent epic is the John Barrymore show - a bravura retelling of the Don Juan legend, moving from the Spanish court of Juan's father Don Jose to the decadent, sybaritic grandeur of the Borgias' Rome. In her twelfth film and seventh credited part, young Myrna plays Mai, a lady-in-waiting of Lucrezia Borgia (Estelle Taylor, above, left). The more expressive histrionics required by the medium are fun (it's no wonder that, once sound came, so many silent stalwarts tended to overact), as are some of the pithy title cards. Good.

IMDb: This was the first film made with a synchronised music score (and some sound effects), but, more than that, it is wondrous and spectacular entertainment with brilliant performances and magical camerawork. Like all great silent films there are very few titles because the actors tell the story without words. And what actors they are! John Barrymore is dashing as Don Juan, but he also gives the man great emotional depth - and the scene where he transforms his face while masquerading as a villain reveals not just talent but genius! But where would Don Juan be without beautiful women? And here we have three of the most alluring ever to grace the scene - Estelle Taylor as Lucrezia Borgia, lovely but deadly, Mary Astor, bewitchingly young and charmingly innocent, and Myrna Loy, exotic, evil, exquisite! A wonderful film / The best segment is the Prologue where Barrymore plays the senior Don Jose and catches his wife in adultery. A gem of a piece of acting. Another excellent one is where he masquerades as Neri, the Alchemist, sliding his facial features into his Mr. Hyde leer and back again. Astor as the love interest is insipid / A thoroughly enjoyable film for those who savour swashbuckling costume drama, or melodrama. There are terrific fights, an awesome chase scene on horseback, oodles of passion and canoodling and John Barrymore showing off his shape in a costume that today's actors wouldn't be caught dead in.

THE LAST OF THE DUANES (1930)



The Last Of The Duanes is a surprisingly well-turned, thrill-a-minute Zane Grey Western that, while made in 1930, has a near full set of tropes: the clean-cut hero (George O'Brien, above), the epic scenery, the covered wagon fording the river, wanted posters, a cattle rustler, angry townsfolk, Stetsons, fancy shirts, a barn dance, plenty of gun-play including a couple of quick-on-the-draw shoot-outs, riders galloping full-tilt through the alkali, an ambush in the canyon and the outlaw band brought to book by the Ranger's posse. A few Apache, a herd of buffalo, a railroad train and a saloon would make a full house. Though third-billed, Loy's part is a relatively small one - that of Lola, disaffected wife of chief baddie Bland. The tale that's told, of retribution, rescue and justice eventually done, is incidental. Back in 1930 this would have been 54 minutes of innocent, escapist fun. Unfortunately, the print of the film viewable on Youtube looks nothing like the above still. Rather, it is sadly wasted and doesn't sound too hot either. But it's serviceable enough to see that O'Brien as Buck Duane, here clocking up his 36th of 85 credits in 42 years (1922-1964, though only two post-dated 1951), carries the film with confident assurance, whether in the saddle or out. A leading man of classic silent films (*The Iron Horse*, *Sunrise*) then a Cowboy Star in B-Western talkies, we catch him here on the cusp of that transition. Loy does all that's required of her - a few smouldering looks, a bit of fire, a little coquetry - that finally adds up to not too much, for it's clear all through that this here is man's country, dusty, raw and rugged, where the ladies, in art as in life back then, play second fiddle.

RENEGADES (1930)



This jaded print of a Foreign Legion yarn is crippled by crass acting from Noah Beery in particular and others (including Loy, in parts) too. The Sheik (above) is played by Bela Lugosi. *Renegades* is of interest principally to see just what Loy had to go through in order to get finally (for this was her *fiftieth* film and she was still two years away from *The Animal Kingdom*) where and what she wanted. 90 long minutes. Patience required.

IMDb: Not very exciting, quite slooow for the most part, poorly acted, even for 1930, and with little cinematic value, still *Renegades* is not completely awful. This is the worst Myrna Loy performance I have ever seen - the term "cardboard cut-out" springs to mind - and Warner Baxter is his usual over-dramatic, bombastic self. In my humble opinion he was one of the most overrated actors of that period, always seeming to play very righteous characters. Bela Lugosi is a breath of fresh air compared to those around him. He even swings his robe over his shoulder and strides out of the tent in his theatrical *Dracula* style! There is some camera movement, but most of it is long dolly shots of two people having a conversation. Victor Fleming had not yet quite honed his workmanlike style and is some way here from *Gone With The Wind*. The plot, typical of the period, is half-baked nonsense. *Renegades* is not really worth anyone's time except as a curio for fans of the director or the actors or early talkies / Still typecast as a exotic vamp, the young Myrna Loy is evil as can be, but still irresistibly beautiful.

Renegades, an audible pictorial adaptation of André Armandy's novel of the French Foreign Legion, is muddled and tedious ... Mr. Beery tackles a role with a German accent and his voice is too strident ... Myrna Loy appears to be well supplied with garments suitable to a siren. Her acting is, however, quite praiseworthy. (Mordaunt Hall, *The New York Times*, 8 November 1930)

ROGUE OF THE RIO GRANDE (1930)



Down on the border, El Malo (José Bohr, above) is a not-so-bad bandit and Loy the star attraction in the local cantina. The simple little tale that ensues is all over in 52 minutes. Production values are primitive and Bohr's acting goes with the territory. But it's hard not to be charmed by the Old World rusticity of it all, and Raymond Hatton as Pedro is actually quite good. Young Myrna wanted to be a dancer before she wanted to be anything else, and here she dances and sings (or was she dubbed?) with abandon. Don't expect *The Magnificent Seven* or *High Noon* - but its historical interest makes this one worth finding.

IMDb: A decent little Saturday afternoon oater. Superior talent, fine staging and good acting serve to make this a pleasant way to pass an hour / Loy's performance is rotten, her singing is unbelievably bad and she can't dance either. To add to her woes, she is unattractively costumed and unflatteringly photographed. As for the picture, it's hard to imagine anyone's career surviving it. Raymond Hatton managed it, but José Bohr, in his first Hollywood film, was never heard from again. I'll say this for *Rogue Of The Rio Grande*, it's so bad that it's actually entertaining. I've watched it three or four times and each time found something new to marvel at / The sort of archaic talkie that amazed crowds at the time but quickly became outmoded. Part of it is the quality of the sound and staginess of the production, part of it the terrible singing. Mid-1930s audiences came to expect much better / All of the characters seem very stereotypical ... It's hard to imagine Loy going on to a huge career after this sad little film / *Rogue Of The Rio Grande* is an enjoyable early sound Western complete with the usual stilted dialogue, staginess, often desultory camera work, huge Stetsons and much personal integrity shown by the characters - great stuff, corny and dated, yes, but highly entertaining.

THE DEVIL TO PAY! (1930)



Ronald Colman - always good value - plays the family black sheep and Loy his actress amour in this romantic comedy concerning love and manners among the well-heeled. With Loretta Young. 69 pleasantly anodyne minutes.

IMDb: Colman plays the financially irresponsible but irresistibly charming younger son of a wealthy English peer. His girlfriend is a star of the music halls, and hence in 1930 a denizen of the demi-monde, played with her typical svelte narrow-eyed silkiness by the youthful Myrna Loy. The romantic female lead is an equally youthful and fresh-faced Loretta Young, who had not yet become the proto-Julie Andrews we generally know her as, but was still a blushing girl exuding all the sweetness of a rose garden and laughing merrily and heartily the whole time. It is obvious that a character with her terrific sense of humour was needed to appreciate the snob-busting social anarchism of the refreshing aristocratic character played by Colman. The plot barely matters, as is so often the case with these light and amusing films. This is just such fun / The repartee between the characters is delightful. Colman and Young (just 17 here) have charm to spare. My favourite scene is when Colman gets the dog to help him write a letter to Loy to break off their relationship. A witty comedy done with class / I really enjoyed Frederick Kerr as Colman's Colonel Blimp of a father / A light and breezy romantic comedy from start to finish. If you're looking for the kind of escapist entertainment that lightened the hearts of audiences during the Great Depression, this little film will fit the bill / Colman is always a delight. Though with a demeanour akin to Errol Flynn's, he was unable to display Flynn's physical agility due to a disabling wound received during World War I. But he had agility of soul. Loy's showgirl is similar to the exotic vamp parts she was so often stuck with at Warner Brothers when she was a contract player there from 1926 until shortly before this film was made in 1930 / A "must see".

REBOUND (1931)



Donald Ogden Stewart's play *Rebound* ran on Broadway from February to May 1930 before being reworked for the screen. Robert Williams (second right, above) Walter Walker and Pierre D'Ennery played in both productions. And Ina Claire (left), Williams and Loy - saddled with the bad girl part again - all act with winning conviction. Nonetheless, their combined talent is unable to breathe any flicker of life into this desperately dull and ultimately craven drama about hasty marriage. Unfortunately, the circulating ex-TCM print looks nothing like the image above, but, even if it did, *Rebound* would still be 89 dead minutes. Praise for this dog is hard to fathom. Avoid.

IMDb: Ina Claire had big eyes, an upturned nose, a precision of inflection to rival Judy Holliday's and a way of dominating a room the moment she entered it. Not conventionally pretty and too old for this sort of dewy-young-thing part (she was about 40), she's nevertheless a joy to watch. The movie, from a mildly successful play, is one of those drawing-room comedies that pretends the Depression never happened and spends most of its time arranging and rearranging couples. It's fluff, and with a last minute happy ending one doesn't believe. Myrna Loy makes a delectable rival / Stagy and stuffy, but Ina Claire is brilliant. Her performance defines a manner of acting that would dominate comedies through the 1960s.

Mordaunt Hall: A breezy entertainment, but as soon as it enters upon a tearful discussion on the merits of love it becomes becalmed. The light patter clashes with the serious talk and the result is that the argument lacks sincerity. The fault, however, lies with Mr. Stewart, for this is quite a faithful reproduction of his stage work and one that is cleverly acted by a cast headed by Ina Claire, who appears to be well suited to her part until the last chapter, when Sara becomes lachrymose. There are a number of bright lines in the course of this offering, but some of them are rather forced, particularly toward the end. Robert Ames's interpretation of Truesdale is capable. Myrna Loy is satisfactory as Evie. Hale Hamilton's portrayal of Patterson is not up to his usual standard. Louise Closser Hale and Walter Walker are capital as Sara's parents. E. H. Griffith has done a good job in his direction and the scenes are carefully and tastefully staged. (*The New York Times*, 29 August 1931)

TRANSATLANTIC (1931)



Reviewers have good things to say about this groundbreaking Fox Studios film set aboard a transatlantic liner. Unfortunately, however, the only circulating copy has degraded audio and tired video such that viewing pleasure is crimped. The image above, with Edmund Lowe and Greta Nissen, shows what the film once looked like and the one below (looking rather better here than it does on a TV screen!) what we must settle for now. Loy's part is a modest one. The atmospheric denouement, involving stormy seas and an engine room shoot-out over a churning, insistent soundtrack, is the most arresting passage of an otherwise lacklustre film. 72 minutes.

IMDb: Made in the early morning of talking pictures, this belies any notion you might have of early talkies, with fast editing, a deliriously moving camera and sharp script. Sets are magnificent, with the luxury liner where the action takes place assuming the atmosphere of some Byzantine palace. Best of all, it's capped off with a tour-de-force cat-and-mouse shoot-out through the vast engine room, which James Wong Howe's photography turns into a visual Wonderland maze of catwalks, huge machines and glossy steam. Script, story and playing are all top-notch / A pretty fair movie - look for Myrna Loy as she begins her journey to becoming Queen of Hollywood / This was the first talkie to extensively observe shipboard life and *Titanic* owes everything to it. The plot is forgettable but what is not are the sets. The Oscar-winning Art Director created vast ocean liner interiors, right down to the bowels of the engine room, and the chase of a fugitive near the end of the film makes full use of them all / The film opens with a terrific long panning shot depicting all the bustle of boarding a huge ocean liner

involving taxis pulling up, everyone streaming through the entrances, baggage trolleys, even a little stray dog (looking a lot like Asta) and all the crew working to get the liner off to a smooth start. The plot then develops along the lines of *Grand Hotel* (and seeing that Vicki Baum published her novel in 1929, this may be the first - although slight - adaptation of it). But the real stars of *Transatlantic* are the atmospheric cinematography of James Wong Howe and the magnificent sets. More than other major studio, Fox embraced the Expressionism that came out of European movies of the '20s and *Transatlantic* had a very Continental air about it. The film credits and even various newspaper clippings that appeared throughout the film were in French. Also it helped that there were no big name stars - Edmund Lowe, Lois Moran, Greta Nissen, John Halliday and Myrna Loy (still then a supporting player) all gave the movie a European feel. Highly recommended.



Where Danger Lives:

I'll admit I'm cheating a little by essaying Transatlantic here, but the film's final few moments, a gun-in-hand, cat-and-mouse chase over the catwalks and up and down the ladders of the steamy bowels of an ocean liner, is as vividly expressionistic as anything you've seen in the noir movies of the forties and fifties. Practically no one has seen Transatlantic but it is not a forgotten film. Plenty of folks want to see it, but just haven't had the opportunity. It hasn't ever been released on tape or disc; it hasn't aired on any of the classic movie channels, and it is conspicuously absent from those movie download sites on the Internet. I purchased my copy from afar, and consequently was not surprised to see the opening title cards displayed in French.

Transatlantic is an American film from William Fox, and all of the spoken dialogue is of course in English, but my copy must have been duped some years ago from a French 35mm print. There are two newspaper cutaway shots (where the audience is shown a newspaper page that helps develop the story) that are also in French, though fortunately my grasp was sufficient to get the point. It's a singularly remarkable film, but the primary reason it's so highly sought after is that it's also an Oscar winner: Gordon Wiles took home the statuette for art direction, though if there had been film editing award at the 1931-2 ceremony, this film and editor Jack Murray would have won it too. (The editing category was still two years away.) Easily as noteworthy as the art direction - and, to contemporary sensibilities, probably more so - is the trendsetting deep-focus photography of James Wong Howe, by 1931 already a virtuoso of the movie camera. And while it might be somewhat unfair to deny kudos for *Transatlantic's* astonishing visuals to director William K. Howard, it must be said that while Howard made a few good pictures, none of them are as striking as this one, obliging us to award the lion's share of the credit to Howe, Wiles and Murray.

There's very little dialogue in opening sequence, though there's a cacophony of noise. The titular ocean liner is preparing to leave New York for England, and we are treated to the dizzying chaos surrounding departure, all characterised by such dazzlingly showy filmmaking that one wonders if Busby Berkeley wasn't somehow involved. Six minutes of crane shots, dolly shots, tracking shots, and zooms; high angles, low angles, long shots and close-ups; the rich and the poor; the young and the old; drunken, sober, elated, and in tears; steerage and first-class; passengers and crew; taxis and barking dogs. It's a delightfully frenetic opening, compressing the entire hubbub of departure into a few superbly edited moments. And while such a pace can't be maintained for long, the opening sets the expectation for a fast paced and exciting film, one book-ended with an expressionistic sequence that nearly matches it for sheer visual enjoyment. No one can claim that *Transatlantic* drags, though it necessarily has to slow down through its centre. In the wake of the ship's departure we get to know and travel with the passengers central to the story. I'm not interested in summarising the plot, but the narrative concerns a group of unrelated travellers from assorted circumstances whose shipboard lives intertwine in unexpected ways. You could have figured that out on your own, right? Yet unlike many other films of the period, this is not a particularly plot-heavy film. And although it barely surpasses an hour, its cast of characters are

all surprising well drawn and free of cliché. Characters meet and interact, but one doesn't have the impression initially that the film is moving inexorably towards some resolution of story, that out ultimate goal is to find out "what happened." Following this, it is possible to think of this as a sort of Grand Hotel at sea, though Transatlantic is more consciously visual, less star-driven and churns on mystery rather than melodrama. The star is Edmund Lowe, who plays the mysterious, yet refined and tuxedoed Monty Greer. We assume he's a high stakes gambler or gentleman thief, seemingly on the run. Also travelling are the Grahams (John Halliday and Myrna Loy). He's a wealthy financier and philanderer, she the devoted, even if not so naïve wife. What she doesn't know, however, is that her husband's bank just went belly-up and he's absconding with the funds. The news of their misfortune catches up to them mid-voyage via the ship's newspaper, sending into hysterics many of the other passengers, particularly the pedantic Mr. Kramer (Jean Hersholt) who heads for Graham's cabin and a date with destiny.

There's more to learn about the characters, but I won't get into that. The movie builds up to the gem of a climax I mentioned earlier, where Lowe uses a handgun to tie up all of the story's loose ends. It would be a crime to give the thing away, but this scene in particular is what I feel lets me get away with writing Transatlantic up on a page devoted to noir and crime films. Anyone who sees the sequence can't deny that it must have been highly influential to the generation of filmmakers who would immerse themselves in the noir style. Taking place entirely within the mechanical confines of the ship's darkest and most inaccessible spaces, Lowe chases his quarry through a warren of pipes and pistons, up ladders and across narrow grates, around corners, over ledges, and through the steam - what steam! - billowing from countless valves, seen and unseen, lit magnificently by well-hidden sources. It's tense, expressionistic, and highly stylized. The actors must have sweated off ten pounds in the filming, and had a glorious time doing it. If it was ever true of a film, the denouement is worth the price of admission.

All too often we think we have the lineage of film noir completely pinned down and accounted for. Literary sources, cinematic sources, and even the studios and filmmakers themselves - all lined up and accounted for like the neat rows of faces in a mug book. Then a movie like Transatlantic, an ultra-chic art deco character mystery, bubbles up from the forgotten past, and reminds us that film can be a frustratingly and wonderfully nebulous art form, and that we aren't quite as certain as we think we are. (30 January 2012)

ARROWSMITH (1931)



As I remember, Sinclair Lewis on the page was hard going and this screen adaptation of his 1925 novel *Arrowsmith* proves equally unrewarding. Since the book won the Pulitzer Prize (which its author declined to accept) and the film was four times Oscar nominated (including Best Picture and Best Writing), maybe it's just that theme and presentation have aged very badly, for, like aviation (see *Wings In The Dark*), medicine in the last ninety years has come a very long way and a story that today seems irredeemably hackneyed and shallow may once have offered its audience rather more. The film's opening shot is of a wagon train, establishing that the doctor's pioneering spirit is in his blood, which fact becomes the more amusing when you note that the director is none other than future Western specialist John Ford. Ronald Colman and Helen Hayes lead. Loy's part is a modest one, made smaller by cutting, with little bearing on the plot. 99 lacklustre minutes.

IMDb: A boring disappointment that may have said something to audiences in 1931 but says nothing to us today. The only reason to see this movie is Myrna Loy / Loy quietly choosing sexy clothing in her bedroom is a visual feast and it's always nice to see Colman - here miscast and far too old - even though he seems uncharacteristically to have failed to engage with his character for most of this rather clunky story. This is Ford as the sorcerer's apprentice, making a frightful mess with his wands, before he mastered the art of miracle-making / The senselessness of the contrived happy ending after the four most important persons in Doctor Arrowsmith's life had just died took me aback. It was done quickly and sloppily, too / Colman's butchered drunk scene is acting of the most cringe-worthy kind / A colossal misfire / Lewis's novel - its key that medicine is extremely lucrative and Martin very idealistic - is fine champagne to this film's lemonade! / Atrocious / A bomb / If only Colman had been born around 1906 instead of fifteen years earlier. He was too old for almost every role he played in the sound era, though Hollywood and the public loved him and he was a superb actor.

VANITY FAIR (1932)



The bare bones of Thackeray's novel are refashioned into a grossly simplified but coherent tale, relocated from the Napoleonic era to the 1920s, in which Loy, in her first sound-era starring role, and her second film of *nine* released in 1932, plays cold-blooded adventuress Becky Sharp with winning aplomb. Brisk - just 74 minutes - and basic, yes, but effective too, with a revised ending that improves on the book. A root and branch restoration would work wonders.

IMDb: I've never read a good review of *Vanity Fair* and I can't understand why. For something that was "rushed through in ten days" it all comes off surprisingly well ... The move to a more modern setting does no harm. My main concern is over some of the casting. Barbara Kent (Amelia) was under five feet in height and few of the leading men were very tall either, making Loy look like an absolute Amazon / An example of a film, inept in every category, that *should* be lost. This modern-dress quickie, based on the major characters and interactions of Thackeray's classic novel, is a total bore. Loy is barely acceptable in the lead and shows no cunning or craft. Sharp, after all, is one of literature's supreme sociopaths and Loy plays her as if spending the whole film trying to find a missing purse. Dreadful! / As with many early talkies, and especially ones made by smaller studios, there is little skill demonstrated by cast or crew / Before Loy became MGM's reigning good girl in scores of genteel and comic roles, she was an actress. Here she gives a very solid performance in a film that should be seen / Dated and creaky, with poor acting and a cheapness about it. I suspect that the film was set in the 1920s to avoid the added expense of costumes and wigs / Allied Artists was one of those fly-by-night studios in early talkies-era Hollywood that lasted only two years (1931-2) with only 23 films (mostly westerns) in its output. Watch this and it's not hard to see why / A must for Myrna Loy fans / Loy is a wonderful Becky Sharp who "plays" Becky as she plays her suitors, with skill and a depth of worldly knowledge sadly lacking in the would-be lovers. Try and see through the degraded medium and respond to a good story elevated by the charming, enticing Myrna Loy.

LOVE ME TONIGHT (1932)



I'd have called this a small beer, minor musical, running 88 minutes, starring Maurice Chevalier (above, centre) and Jeanette MacDonald (above, right), in which Loy takes a small, non-singing part. But here's a more informed and informative view:

Ah, Paramount. Once upon a time, it was the mark of quality - more so than MGM, in my very humble opinion - and that time was most definitely the Pre-Code era. You no doubt remember Trouble In Paradise (1932); same year, same studio, we have the utterly charming Love Me Tonight. Alas, no Lubitsch this time, but we do get Rouben Mamoulian directing, Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette MacDonald starring and Myrna Loy, Charlie Ruggles and C. Aubrey Smith supporting. More about them presently.

The plot is just a bit of fairytale fluff: Maurice Courtelin (Chevalier) is a tailor and a ladies' man. He's just started his own custom tailor business and thinks he's found terrific luck in his newest customer. The Vicomte Gilbert de Varèze (Ruggles), known as one of the best-dressed men in France, has ordered 14,000 francs' worth of suits. Less well-known, at least to Maurice, is that Gilbert is a notorious debtor. Oops. So Maurice decides to follow Gilbert back to the family chateau to settle his debt - and, on the way, meets Princess Jeanette (MacDonald).

Jeanette was married three years ago, to a man five decades her senior. He died, and she hasn't had a whiff of fun or romance since - not that there was much to be had in her marriage to the prince. She often has fainting spells, due to what nineteenth-century quacks would have called "female hysteria." When cocksure Maurice bursts into her chateau, she doesn't quite know how to react. He's hit with le coup de foudre, and aggressively romances her ... It's almost hard to believe that this sweet little operetta-inspired fable is a pre-Code film. Chevalier's lechery seems to be almost suitable for, say, 1938! MacDonald so clearly wants love and marriage that Joseph Breen would probably have obliged her himself! There's even a scene with Maurice feeding a stag oatmeal and making doe eyes at it! What could be cuter? What could be more innocuous? Maybe not all of those pre-Codes are as dirty as - oh, wait a minute.

Didn't I say we'd get back to Myrna Loy et al.? Yes. Well. Here we are. Love Me Tonight would be plenty adorable if it were just Chevalier and MacDonald, chasing and being chased. But fortunately, Loy is there as Countess Valentine, a girl after my own heart. Here are some of her best quips:

Jeanette: Do you think of anything but men, dear?

Valentine: Oh, yes! Schoolboys.

Gilbert: [after the Princess has fainted] Could you go for a doctor?

Valentine: Certainly! Bring him right in!

Valentine: Can't we ever get a footman under 40 around here?!

The Duke: [on hearing that she has drilled holes in a door to spy on Maurice as he dresses and undresses] Valentine! Are you aware that that door's come down to us through generations?

Valentine: So have my instincts!

She is just fabulous. Man-mad in the extreme, and unapologetically so. She certainly doesn't want to get married. She doesn't want to have to buy the cow if she can get the milk for free.

Ruggles is also a treat, as a rogue himself. When joking with Valentine about how to "handle" their uncle the duke (Smith), "the old skyhawk," Gilbert says he'll start a charity "to find good homes

for bad stenographers." The first time we meet him, he is running in a race, clad only in his undershirt and boxers, to escape the vengeful husband of a girl with whom he was caught in flagrante. I don't know why Charlie Ruggles isn't as big a star as Barrymore, but I often lie awake at night wondering.

There are other pre-Code goodies, thankfully: Chevalier singing, in praise of Paris, "You would sell your wife and daughter for just one Latin Quarter"; a song about needing to get laid for medical reasons; a suitor of Jeanette's who never seems to understand that he's making a dirty joke; Smith singing, "I'd rather throw a bomb at her than let her wed a commoner!" and a song that was very sadly cut and lost forever, which included the line: "A peach must be eaten, a drum must be beaten, and a woman needs something like that." Oh, naughty!

I will admit that, despite my affection for it, it's a somewhat slight little film. However, the Rodgers and Hart songs are fantastic - especially my favourite version of "Isn't It Romantic?" - and it's just lovely to look at. Paramount was a great studio for Continental flair, and Love Me Tonight has it in spades. Sets that seem to be made of real marble, enormous doors, California countryside made to look genuinely French - oh, yes. Good old Paramount. MGM had its gloss and Warner Bros. its grit, but Paramount had panache, élan, elegance, charm - everything, in short, that you could possibly want in a movie, whether pre or post-Code.

McWhirk, *More Stars Than In The Heavens*, 4 March 2013

IMDb: I defy anyone to name a movie musical more exuberant, more creative, more romantic, melodic, hilarious or escapist; not even *Singin' In The Rain* equals it. From opening shot (a rhythmic ballet-mechanique of Paris coming to life at dawn) to fade-out (a happy-ending finale that also parodies Eisenstein), it's bursting with ingenious ideas. The pre-Code screenplay, rife with double entendres and social satire, is a princess-and-commoner love story written to the strengths of its two stars: Chevalier, never more charming, and MacDonald, never a subtler comedienne. With one foot in fantasy and the other in reality it manages to sustain an otherworldly feeling even while grounded in the modern-day Paris of klaxons, tradesmen and class consciousness. The supporting cast is phenomenal, with Myrna Loy as a man-hungry countess, C. Aubrey Smith doing his old-codger thing, Charles Butterworth priceless as a mild-mannered nobleman ("I fell flat on my flute!") and Blanche Frederici, Ethel Griffies and Elizabeth Patterson as a benign version of the Macbeth witches' trio. All are wonderful / An enchanting film, remarkably well made for 1932, lively, sparkling and directed with a smoothness and originality that's still amazing / A musical fairy tale. Sit back, relax and enjoy / A masterpiece, way ahead of its time, one of the freshest, brightest, breeziest musicals ever made / Maurice and Jeanette, though an acquired taste, really shine here.

THIRTEEN WOMEN (1932)



In this 59 minutes of fantastical fun, Myrna plays a "half-caste Hindu" she-devil with fiendish, hypnotic powers - she can stare at a victim and put them to sleep or even think them into committing suicide - who sets out to avenge herself on twelve schoolmates who slighted her for not being "white". She sends them horoscopes foretelling doom and leaves the rest to auto-suggestion, plus her help as and when needed. Cut from an original 73 minutes, which is a great shame. Nonetheless, from a novel by Tiffany Thayer, this spicy slice of B-movie hokum is a tongue-in-cheek treat, with Loy in fine form. With Ricardo Cortez, Kay Johnson and Jill Esmond (then Mrs Laurence Olivier). A young Welsh actress called Peg Entwistle made her screen debut in this film then, two days after its release, achieved a spurious immortality by throwing herself off the H of the HOLLYWOODLAND sign to her death.

IMDb: After eighty-odd years, *Thirteen Women* still stands up as an eerie, lush thriller that provides more genuine chills than any of today's counterparts. Even chopped to 59 minutes, it is still a landmark horror film / A wonderful little thriller starring Irene Dunne and Myrna Loy before they were stars / A great reminder of the wondrous potential of films made before the Production Code. Loy is great / Loy comes across better than in some of her other early exotic roles. She is a villain and a terrible one, but looks lovely and, evil as may be, is also poignant / An oldie but a goodie, albeit a short one / What a stunner that Loy is ... and from Montana! / Suspend your disbelief and relish this fun-to-watch "guilty pleasure" / Ludicrous and outlandish fun / Short, fast-paced, mysterious and actually quite good. Loy gives a fine performance using her hypnotic eyes to seduce unwilling partners - and victims. Dunne is excellent too / This campy, hour-long, tensely paced and engaging little coo-coo bird has to be seen to be believed. Cortez is always a pleasure to watch - a smooth, beautiful man and a superb

actor who brings a touch of class to all of his work. Young Myrna Loy is beginning to show the prowess that would make her one of the most successful of twentieth century actors. A unique and interesting 1930s films that you won't be sorry finding.

A (slightly tweaked) latter day review:

In the years before she became Nora Charles and the Perfect Wife, Myrna Loy was a sultry, Theda Bara-esque siren of the screen playing exotic roles in the final days of the silent and the nascent sound eras. Though her early career saw her pigeon-holed into these kind of roles for some reason, she did throw herself into them with gusto, making the most out of tawdry characters like Ursula in Thirteen Women. This may be a second-tier RKO production, but it's filled with some first-rate scene chewing from just before her career took a more "respectable" turn ... It's interesting how much the plot resembles something from a more modern horror film. A group of wealthy sorority girls, a shunned prospective member seething with years of vengeful thoughts, a bloody trail of letters that leads to the killer - this stuff is way more prevalent in an '80s slasher than a '30s drama. The movie follows down that path for a while, too, and it gives the story an element of interest that it couldn't have had in its own time. It doesn't actually play out anything like horror, but it's an awfully nasty story for its time, especially for something with an almost exclusively female cast, which was rare enough then, anyway. Myrna Loy, though oddly low on the cast list, is a riot as the villain and by far the most compelling thing about the film. Her "half-caste" makeup is pretty ridiculous and she had been stuck in these roles far too long, but this was a Montana girl who knew how to milk the exotic out of them and play it up like few others could. Irene Dunne was never that powerful an actress and delivers a fairly bland performance here. As one of a number of high society women, she fits just fine for what she has to do, but it's not much to write home about. Loy is the one who makes the picture, though, and is the one really good reason to watch. For the record, there aren't thirteen women in the film but eight, and a couple of them basically have no character. Maybe Six Women isn't as catchy a title and certainly part of the problem is the running time of circulating prints. Fourteen minutes are missing from the original theatrical release, which inevitably stunts the story as well as the title. The omissions kill the suspense going toward the end of the film and make the finale hard to follow. There is enough fun to be had here in spite of this, with some good plot points and a lurid sensibility that director George Archainbaud brings from his silent film days. Thirteen Women is most definitely B-level fare, but it's an enjoyable way to spend an hour.

Daryl Loomis, DVD Verdict, 26 February 2012

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THE ANIMAL KINGDOM (aka *The Woman In His House*) (1932)



Stage drama *The Animal Kingdom*, written by Philip (The Philadelphia Story) Barry and starring Leslie Howard (who also co-produced) ran for 183 performances at Broadway's Broadhurst Theatre through the first half of 1932 before being filmed by RKO as *The Woman In His House*. Along with Howard, William Gargan, playing ex-pug butler Red, and Ilka Chase as Grace, also reprised their stage roles on screen. Female leads Ann Harding and Myrna Loy are both very good, as is the tale of games that are played, of traps that are set, of restlessness and dissatisfaction with love, with work, with art, with life. Howard's Connecticut-based publisher Tom loves free-thinking artist Daisy, but only comes the hard way to know it. 85 minutes. Recommended.

IMDb: The story hasn't aged one bit. Howard is brilliant / A sparkling film examining character and intelligence, motives and integrity, the artist's life versus the conventional life. It is a love story which depicts love and friendship on many levels. This film is one of those interesting ones where the viewer has to be able to listen to dialogue and interpret meaning. There are subtle interactions between the characters and a civilised, low-key ambiance / There is a uniqueness in this film's open attitude towards love and friendship and how to piece them together that I have not often seen / Surprisingly honest and frank / A super film, quite shocking even for the time. The ending was also in keeping with the pre-code Code. Entertaining, intelligent and heartily recommended / I enjoyed the movie, but I'm surprised that so many seem not to notice how shallow and stupid its ideas are / Interesting story, good cast, enjoyable watch / Harding's performance is very honest ... Loy, absolutely ravishing, essays the part of the glam wife beautifully. Howard is handsome and thoughtful in the lead. Very good.

WHEN LADIES MEET (1933)



Rachel Crothers' *When Ladies Meet* ran for five months on Broadway before spawning this classy screen treatment. As in *The Animal Kingdom*, Ann Harding (above, left) and Loy head up a very strong cast who conspire to deliver a highly satisfying piece of filmed theatre in which young authoress Loy learns the hard way the difference between the theory and practice of Life. 85 minutes. Fine.

IMDb: Harding's superb performance should have earned an Oscar nomination. Ditto the supporting performance of Alice Brady (above, right) as the flighty society matron Bridget / A thought provoking and stimulating movie. Ann Harding steals the show / The stars' charisma and tremendously witty dialogue make this one a blast / Why, oh why couldn't those in charge put Myrna Loy's eyebrows where God intended? / Some very tart lines and smart performances by Harding, Loy and Morgan, but the direction (reportedly troubled) is sluggish - takes 45 minutes to warm up / A great example of the type of sophisticated comedy that's just not being done any more / An interesting story, well developed and acted, but with almost no surprises - and definitely *not* a comedy, meaning "something that will make you laugh" / There's something about Ann Harding that you can't help but like. Whether it's her unusual beauty, her sensuous speaking voice, her obvious intelligence - all together she has enormous appeal. She was extremely popular in the early thirties before fans tired of her "stiff upper lip" portrayals and found favourites elsewhere. Her best known film is probably *The Animal Kingdom* in which she and Loy scored such a hit that they were paired again in this scintillating comedy adapted from Rachel Crothers' play. The conversations the two have *When Ladies Meet* make for essential viewing. Highly Recommended.

PENTHOUSE (1933)



Three years and 26 films on from *Renegades*, Warner Baxter (above) is back, this time as an intrepid New York attorney cum detective, which, while a step up from a rabid French Foreign Legionnaire, still leaves him as a poor man's Gable struggling to impress. After her belated 35th minute entrance, Loy is the best thing about this low-powered murder mystery. Charles Butterworth, seen previously in *Love Me Tonight*, reprises his bewildered / Stan Laurel shtick, this time as a butler, again to good effect. Ned Pendleton, another '30s regular, is amiably dopey. Wanted: one half-decent plot. 89 minutes.

IMDb: The two aspects of the plot that carry the movie are Loy as a very believable call girl and Pendleton as a gangster who is devoted to Baxter for getting him off the proverbial murder rap / A great little picture. Maybe the lack of stars (Loy excepted) keeps this off the radar. Well worth rediscovering / Quality acting, sharp dialogue and quick pace, but, given its subject matter, needs more grit. Comic relief from Charles Butterworth and Tom Kennedy are just what it doesn't need / I love risqué lines and innuendoes and this picture is loaded with them / Baxter is an excellent lead and the chemistry between him and Loy is a pleasure to see / Baxter lacks the charisma of a true star / As the most lovable fallen woman of the pre-Code era, Loy demonstrates the impish allure that will light up the screen for years to come / Genre-based yet quite original and full of all the necessary elements: virtue, vice, mystery, false suspicion, resolution of mystery, resolution of false suspicion, romance, heavy action, jazz and many doors that seem to want to open, but just the right ones open at just the right intervals to keep you entertained throughout this gem of a film / I've seen at least 20 better Myrna Loy films / Loy's very sexy performance steals the show.

NIGHT FLIGHT (1933)



Night Flight is an 85 minute documentary about the establishment of a pan-South American air mail service with limp dramatic elements inserted to give it cinematic credibility. Loy - her part is "wife of Brazilian pilot", which tells you all you need to know about the depth of characterisation on offer - has just two scenes and only six minutes of screen time. Her husband is played by William Gargan (above), who got his start in *The Animal Kingdom*. This may have been lauded in its day, but it flies poorly now. One to leave be.

IMDb: Not as bad as one has been led to believe. The strengths and weaknesses of this production are exactly those of the studio system. No expense or effort has been spared to make this film, yet it never really 'sings'. The cast is one of the most spectacular rounded up for an 85 minute film. The photography has a black and white sheen, a luminosity, which must have been unspeakably spectacular in the original nitrate print projected onto a silver screen. The first five minutes are a set-up for audience sympathy - corny but well done - dealing with an emergency delivery of polio serum. The worst parts of the film are exactly where it cleaves closest to Saint-Exupéry's book. Characters stop and begin to expostulate with a touch of the Eugene O'Neills. In this case poetry is better shown than expressed. One of the strangest phenomena of *Night Flight* is the fact that its legion of stars rarely, if ever, play a scene with one another. Helen Hayes is married to Gable yet they never share the screen together. John Barrymore does his 'eyebrow' thing to excess, signalling that he was unhappy either with his role or his domestic arrangements or both. Gable, just beginning his reign as the King of Hollywood, is almost unrecognisable in his pilot's outfit. Robert Montgomery manages to have scenes with most of his co-stars. Hayes is effective as the wife, as far as that goes. Myrna Loy has the type of role usually described as 'thankless'. A disappointing film, but by no means terrible.

MEN IN WHITE (1934)



The future King and Queen of the Movies bring a Pulitzer Prize-winning play to the screen - success assured, surely? Sadly not. The story seems to be that overworked young Doctor Gable (above) gets a student nurse pregnant. She gets a backstreet abortion that goes wrong and, despite the best efforts of the hospital surgery team, dies in suitably maudlin style. Gable and flighty fiancée Loy are brought grudgingly to accept that a doctor's primary obligation is not to him or herself and dependants, but to "humanity". But, since the Code won't allow the immoral aspect of this tale to be portrayed, you need to read closely between the lines to pick it up. (All we're actually shown of the interaction between Gable and the nurse is one passionless kiss - so, *that's* how babies are made!) Poor material overzealously edited combined with a good deal of wooden acting from the support results in uninspired and shamelessly manipulative dross. Running just 73 minutes, it's soon done, at least. Avoid.

IMDb: See Gable as a real actor, before he became crusted over / Uncannily like ER. Ahead of its time! / This is one of several Gable-Loy pairings: in *Wife vs. Secretary*, *Manhattan Melodrama* and *Men In White* their romances are compulsively watchable but obviously headed for turbulence. You could boil it down to tension between his brusque "salt of the earth" masculinity and Loy's caring but slightly petulant "uptown girl" persona. If the Gable and Loy types in these films made a go of it, it would not be a marriage made in heaven. That's telegraphed from the first reel. But it's fun to watch / Too earnest and preachy / My mother could have sat through it and had no idea what happened. Talk about subtle / A potentially good film destroyed by the Hays Code.

MANHATTAN MELODRAMA (1934)



Gable (above) and Powell play friends who grow up on opposite sides of the law. The careers of both men prosper until the inevitable day when State Governor Powell is requested to commute the death sentence of murderer Gable. Will duty prevail over friendship and obligation? Gable could play these wryly amoral rogue parts in his sleep and Powell shows once more what a fine actor he was. Loy, in her first of fourteen films with him, moves with conviction from racketeer's moll to politician's wife in an Oscar-winning story made more familiar by 1938's *Angels With Dirty Faces*. 90 entertaining minutes.

IMDb: A delight from beginning to end. Although all the players were great, special kudos to Powell, whose uncompromising integrity causes him to lose almost everything he has. In a part much more nuanced than is usual for him, his is a gut-wrenching performance / Dillinger was shot for *this*? He should have waited for *The Thin Man* / Powell is so hopelessly uncharismatic and uninteresting that he doesn't do the movie any good, which is nothing new. I'll never understand how a guy like that could ever have become a star / It's hard not to enjoy a film starring Gable, Powell and Loy - they were dynamite actors and professionals. Sure, they tended to play the same type of character again and again, but you grew to love them and look forward to this because the films were so consistently good and exciting / As soon as Powell and Loy are on screen together, the fizz begins, and they spark off one another like two cheeky little flints who just can't wait to make wonderful fire together. Myrna Loy just had the right kind of wry and whimsical manner to complement the dry humour of Powell. From the moment they first look at each other here, a unique screen magic is born that would last through fourteen films / You don't gotta believe it. You do gotta like it.

THE THIN MAN (1934)



This screen adaptation of a Dashiell Hammett novel proved so successful that no fewer than *five* sequels eventually followed. Hammett, like Chandler, wrote stories with impossibly obscure and complicated plots, and, despite the script's best efforts, this one will make your head spin too. But that hardly matters, since it's not the story so much as the effortlessly winning charm of Loy, Powell and Asta (above) that steer this one delightfully home. 87 sparkling minutes.

IMDb: An incredibly good film. The characters are intensely believable and yet funnier than anyone I've ever met. The pacing is very modern, the plot is complicated yet very clear and I felt like only half an hour had gone by when it ended / Myrna Loy is stunningly beautiful, and who can forget Asta? / Wickedly funny. Everything that today's movies are not. Sophisticated, slick and rife with clever repartee. A ten-star jewel not to be missed / Powell and Loy share a wonderful chemistry in this very close adaptation of Dashiell Hammett's novel. Their interplay comes over very naturally, as if they *were* married. Nick is a lovable lush with a sharp mind and Nora is rich beyond imagination, with a freshness and innocence not found in today's movie characters. The film has plenty of site gags with some occasional drama interspersed / The whole *Thin Man* series is a joy to watch, but, in my opinion, the first is still the best! / Puts modern movies to shame / Powell and Loy breath phenomenal life into the roles of Nick and Nora Charles / Some of the dialogue is dated, but that only adds to the charm / Filled to bursting with sophisticated elegance. Despite the odd dip into darkness, the film's tone remains bright and breezy throughout. The verbal gymnastics make *The Thin Man* one of the best movies I've ever listened to. Everything else makes it one of the best I've ever seen / This is the first of fourteen collaborations between Powell and Loy, one of the best comic duos of all time / My only complaint is Nick and Nora's constant drinking. Supposedly cute and charming, it makes them look like alcoholics.

STAMBOUL QUEST (1934)



Loy carries this film from start to finish, but should perhaps have saved herself the effort, for its counter-espionage story, worlds removed from James Bond and his ilk, is extremely silly. Myrna plays Germany's top spy, Helena Bohlen, a femme fatale with about as much guile as a fairly dim five-year-old. ("You're a spy, aren't you?" "Yes.") But still she worms damning evidence from Turkish commander Ali Bey (C. Henry Gordon, above, right) with little more than a flutter of her lashes. See it, if at all, as a quaint anachronism or pre-war fairy tale - just don't expect an even semi-serious drama. 85 minutes. Poor.

IMDb: There has always been an audience for this type of picture: the exotic adventure filled with intrigue, shadowy motives, duplicity and questionable identities. The best of such films will also be somewhat credible; the lesser ones, such as this, will bear little relation to realistic characters or believable happenings. *Stamboul Quest* is a cinematic comic strip in which everything is subordinate to the plot. Unfortunately that plot sorely lacks suspenseful or adventurous elements, so that even with its reliance on double and triple cross, invisible ink, temporary insanity and a backdrop of references to Mata Hari, there is little to provoke the viewer's interest. Scenes are flat and the picture drags. Loy does nicely with a part that requires her to keep her more intense emotions in check, but George Brent (above, left) fails as a happy-go-lucky American set in contrast to the formal, tradition-bound Old World characters who surround him. His high-spirited cavorting may be worthy of an adolescent, but would surely not generate feelings of love in Loy's worldly, self-possessed counterspy. Though the main supporting roles are handled commendably, there is not much to recommend this picture. It has been all-but forgotten, and deservedly so / A pleasant trifle / Abandon the Quest.

EVELYN PRENTICE (1934)



A compelling murder mystery, this third Powell-Loy vehicle sounds as if it might be some kind of *Thin Man* spin-off or moonlighting exercise, but it's played altogether more straight than larky Nick and Nora, and there's no Asta - though there is a sickly sweet little girl and zany house guest Amy (Una Merkel, above). The story is a good one, beautifully acted out by two *simpatico* stars at the height of their considerable powers. 79 minutes. Recommended.

IMDb: Powell and Loy are both superb, breathing new life into a common plot. May seem slow, but suspenseful, intriguing and certainly worth it / One of the best examples of what resulted when the studio machine didn't quite know what to do with its talent pool. Powell and Loy, who had recently proven themselves a winning team in the original *Thin Man*, are again the urbane marrieds. Their individual talents and snappy chemistry aren't entirely swamped by this soapy melodrama, but they are given a slight patina of caricature. Thank god the studio figured it out and gave us five more *Thin Man* movies / An enjoyable, solid film with a few surprises / An absorbing, intelligent picture, bolstered by sensitive performances and adept handling of an adult story. Its fundamentals may be overly familiar and perhaps a bit too much plot gets in the way of believable, touching characterisations. But you will care about the main characters, whose weaknesses and oversights lead them to the brink of ruin. Powell and Loy, alone and together, are fine, as always / This courtroom mystery could have stood fewer melodramatic contrivances, but the dialogue and characterisations are strong. Far stronger, however, are the remarkable performances all round. Loy's quiet desperation is utterly convincing. Powell, good throughout, is especially deft after discovering a stunning secret during the climactic trial. Without a trace of ham, he genuinely looks as if he is about to keel over from shock, as he is forced to go on. Well worth seeing.

MYRNA LOY on ...

... Clark Gable

He happened to be an actor, a damned good one, and nobody knew it - least of all Clark. Oh, he wanted to be an actor, but he always deprecated his ability, pretended it didn't matter. He was a really shy man with a terrible inferiority in there somewhere. Something was missing that kept him from doing the things he could have done.

... the "Perfect Wife" label given to her after 1946 hit *The Best Years Of Our Lives*:

(1) Some perfect wife I am. I've been married four times, divorced four times, have no children and can't boil an egg.

(2) It was a role no one could live up to, really. No telling where my career would have gone if they hadn't hung that title on me. Labels limit you, because they limit your possibilities. But that's how they think in Hollywood.

... William Powell and the *Thin Man* series:

(1) I never enjoyed my work more than when I worked with William Powell. He was a brilliant actor, a delightful companion, a great friend and, above all, a true gentleman.

(2) The later [Thin Man pictures] were very bad indeed, but it was always a joy to work with Bill Powell. He was and is a dear friend and, in the early Thin Man films with [director W.S. Van Dyke] we managed to achieve what for those days was an almost pioneering sense of spontaneity.

... late 1960s cinema:

I admire some of the people on the screen today, but most of them look like everybody else. In our day we had individuality. Pictures were more sophisticated. All this nudity is too excessive and it is getting very boring. It will be a shame if it upsets people so much that it brings on the need for censorship. I hate censorship. In the cinema there's no mystery. No privacy. And no sex, either. Most of the sex I've seen on the screen looks like an expression of hostility towards sex.

WINGS IN THE DARK (1935)



This first of three films that Cary Grant (above) and Loy made together (see also *The Bachelor* And *The Bobby-Soxer* and *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House*) tells a contrived and far-fetched tale in an entertaining way, courtesy of two stars easy in each other's company and on their best game. Aside from its major credibility deficit, one to enjoy. 76 minutes.

IMDb: Some beautiful scenes between the two leads and a sense of genuine emotion on the screen before you / This movie shows that Grant had depth as a serious actor / Cliché at best but watchable, thanks to the know-how combination of Loy and Grant early in their movie careers / A decent time passer let down by its terribly clichéd ending / *Wings In The Dark* is dated because aviation has progressed so much since the mid-thirties, and it pales beside the two classic screen comedies Grant and Loy did later. Still it offers an interesting glimpse of both stars in their earlier years and, for Grant, an unusual bit of casting / Not deep or original, but wild and exciting / This movie has several amazing things going for it, and two of them have names: Myrna Loy and Cary Grant / This is a pretty good film with both actors turning in strong performances. Grant gets to show his dramatic flare - the man could really do anything. Now that I've seen so many of his early films, I'm convinced he had a nose job - his nose is definitely longer early on. Nevertheless he was always extremely handsome / One of the most ridiculous abuses of reality on film. Grant and Loy play a story that needs far more credibility than the script delivers, giving a result as absurd as anything you'll see on screen / A little-known '30s gem. Sure, there's a lot of hokum in the story, but Loy as a daring aviatrix and Grant as an inventive young pilot make it believable and compelling. Grant is working on new technology to enable pilots to fly and land "blind" when his eyes are seared by an exploding stove. Loy's growing affection for

him runs into a cold, bitter barrier. But when she accepts a dangerous challenge, he literally rises to the occasion and becomes her eyes in the sky. Even some seemingly minor scenes, as when Grant reacts badly to the gift of a guide dog, have real emotional impact, and the aerial stunt work ranges from exciting to spectacular.



One contemporary and one latter day review:

Wings In The Dark is a pleasantly performed and skilfully filmed melodrama of the peacetime airways which is hampered by an addle-pated narrative. High altitudes have a tendency to make scenarists just a trifle giddy, with the result that the big climax of the Paramount's new photoplay has the appearance of having been composed during a tail spin. If you are anxious to view some of the most striking aerial photography the screen has offered in months, you will have to endure the episode in which Myrna Loy, the daring aviatrix, reaches Roosevelt Field at the conclusion of her great flight from Moscow.

Battling head winds and impenetrable fog, Miss Loy loses her bearings over the stormy waters of Long Island just about the time that her gasoline is running low. Thereupon Cary Grant, the blind aviator, steals a plane and goes aloft to find her. It is his desperate plan, after convoying Miss Loy to safety, to fly off into the great unknown so as not to be a burden to those who love him. Perhaps it is betraying the Paramount Theatre to reveal that Miss Loy saves her lover for the altar by smashing her plane into his as they are about to land, thereupon shocking the nervous system of the stricken airman so severely that he regains his sight.

The foregoing, as well as the rather tedious plot machinery which leads up to it, proves to be disastrous to the work, which is managed with such technical finesse that it ought to have been among the better pictures. Even at that, Wings In The Dark succeeds in being both informative and absorbing when it is showing how the blinded airman invents an instrument board which can be operated by the sightless. Leo Kieran, one of The Times' aviation specialists, informs me that both the stunt flying and the aerial photography in the film are excellent. It is his suspicion, though, that the ingenious blind-flying system invented by the picture's hero is as improbable as the great climax.

Miss Loy continues to be the most refreshing and delightfully real of the cinema's young women, and she is entirely likable as the lady stunt flyer who helps the afflicted airman to recapture his faith in himself. Mr. Grant's pleasant performance as the aviator is also a help.

Andre Sennwald, *The New York Times*, 2 February 1935

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Wings In The Dark is a solid melodrama pairing Cary Grant with Myrna Loy. Playing aviator Ken Gordon, Grant gets a chance to show some vulnerability as an actor. Ken has been working on a way to fly "blind." His plane has all of its windows blacked out, and he operates the craft relying entirely on its instruments. The idea is that a pilot can get through any weather without having to worry about visibility. Loy is Sheila, a struggling female pilot reduced to doing carnival stunts to earn money. She is there when a freak accident causes Ken to go blind for real, and she tries to help him find his way back to doing what he loves. What better way to prove his system than to literally fly blind?

Naturally, things don't go smoothly. Sheila and Ken's assistant (Hobart Cavanaugh) try to shield Ken from a world that isn't going to stay hidden around the corner for long. The film takes a turn for the preposterous when Sheila gets lost on a transatlantic flight and Ken flies out to find her and lead her home, the ultimate victory for his ideas. It's a little hard to believe, what with impassioned and important speeches being shot back and forth across the radio while navigating a foggy skyline, but Loy and Grant play the scenes with the utmost sincerity and make it work. The film up until then is well done, anyway, and both actors fit in their roles well. It's a nice balance to see Grant struggling with his blindness, dealing with the fear and anger inherent in such a life-altering change. For all of its pretty wrapping at the end, not a bad picture.

Jamie S. Rich, *DVD Talk*, 21 November 2006

WIFE vs. SECRETARY (1936)



A heavyweight cast - Gable, Loy and Harlow (above, left), with young James Stewart on the undercard - tell a tale that smoulders promisingly without ever quite bursting into flame. Myrna is the innocent, gossip-victim wife and Harlow the virtuous secretary of magazine publisher Gable in this Code-sanitised yarn concerning the corrosive influence of suspicion and jealousy that passes 87 minutes in tame though pleasantly palatable style.

IMDb: Not much of a story, but with such a cast, who cares? / Warm and touching / A sophisticated and intelligent film that belies its silly title. If not for the slightly forced happy ending, it would be perfection / Close to perfect / Dated but satisfying / Not the best film Gable did with Harlow or Loy, but good fun / Dreary ... Where's the comedy? Even the title is bad! / The ending is *not* happy, but very bittersweet / No classic but entertaining still. Loy's sensitive portrayal raises it a cut above / A well-rounded and exquisite gem, beautifully scripted, intelligently directed, ebulliently acted. Gable is a joy to watch and Loy has to be the most sophisticated creature ever filmed / A superior 1930s "women's picture" / Harlow's starring career blazed briefly, but with almost no wasted roles. Here she gets to behave not like a *débutante*, tenement dweller, criminal's moll, voracious mantrap, comic banshee or adventuress working the China Seas or Malay docksides, but like a normal, working class woman. A part this quiet remains a rarity for the winsome, brilliant and doomed genius that was Jean / Harlow without fizz is rather like a soda gone flat - tolerable but disconcerting / Loy was never lovelier / Star power undermined by mediocre script / Interesting though in parts desperately old fashioned / Though the rest are good, Harlow steals the show / Note that the title has a subtle double meaning, since Gable's character's initials and nickname are V.S.

THE GREAT ZIEGFELD (1936)



While ostensibly a straightforward biopic of Chicago-born impresario Florenz Ziegfeld, *The Great Ziegfeld* effortlessly transcends the genre with several lavish, elaborate, extended show routines deftly woven into an epic romantic musical drama well enough received to scoop the 1936 Best Picture Academy Award. Its authentic recreation of a vibrant era long past renders it culturally and historically invaluable. Luise Rainer as Ziegfeld's first wife Anna Held won Best Actress thanks to a magnetic performance. Fanny Brice, playing herself, also shines. Cowboy philosopher Will Rogers was another set to cameo, but in August 1935 an Alaska plane wreck claimed his life, requiring impersonator A. A. Trimble to step in. The film's title role is played with consummate perfection by the impeccable William Powell (above). Myrna Loy, making another solid contribution, plays Ziegfeld's second wife Billie Burke through the closing fifty minutes of the film. In all, it runs 178 minutes, including an opening overture, entr'acte and "exit music". Here's how Kate Cameron of *The New York Daily News* reviewed it on 9 April 1936:

An extravagant and glittering production

For once in their lives the producers of a pet picture may, with impunity, drag out the word colossal, which has been in disrepute for years because of the producers' great misuse of it in describing their puny products of the early

days. For if ever a moving picture was produced on a grand, lavish, extravagant and glittering enough scale to be so described, it is the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's *The Great Ziegfeld*, which re-opened the Astor Theatre as a two-a-day house in a gala premiere last night.

A Real Super-film

Before letting loose all the fancy adjectives that may be used to describe Metro's latest film extravaganza, it is necessary to say, as a warning to all those who become fidgety at a movie after an hour and a half, that it takes three solid hours to unreel this super special musical picture. There is enough material in it for half a dozen ordinary films, and, as it is presented at the Astor in two sections, separated by a ten-minute intermission, each half runs the length of a long feature picture. The first portion is by far the better part of the picture. It is taken up with Florenz Ziegfeld Junior's early life, beginning with his career as a showman at the Chicago World's Fair, when he exhibited the strong man, Sandow, on the Midway, and ending on an overly-long but gorgeous production number which was the background for the song John Steele made famous in one of Ziegfeld's most famous Follies, Irving Berlin's A Pretty Girl Is Like A Melody.

Written With Authority

William Anthony McGuire, who wrote the story and screen play on which the picture is based, has used his sharpest wits and put his best efforts into this section of the film. He worked with Ziegfeld for many years, writing books for the showman's shows, and he has given the character and story a validity that an author unfamiliar with the subject and scene could not have attained. The rivalry between Ziegfeld, who is superbly represented by William Powell, and another producer known as Billings and who might be a composite of several of Ziegfeld's contemporaries, is delightfully set forth on the screen. The dialogue between these two sparkles brilliantly. Frank Morgan, as Billings, makes an ideal foil for Powell's more dynamic Ziegfeld.

First Great Romance

*The first great romance in the producer's life, his love for and extrapolation of the little French chanteuse, Anna Held, covers a long sequence in his life and forms an important part of the story. Luise Rainer, the Viennese actress with the large and fascinating eyes who played opposite Mr. Powell in *Escapade*, is probably as good a choice for the role of Anna Held as could be found in Hollywood. She rolls her lovely eyes after the traditional manner of La Held and sings in a sweet, small voice the slightly naughty song, "I Wish You'd Come and Play With Me," and "It's Delightful to Be-be-be-be Married."*

Ziegfeld's infidelity to Anna and her break with him are followed by a series of affairs with beautiful chorus girls whom he raises from the ranks, showers with jewels and attention and exploits in the same fashion that brought fame and fortune to Anna. Virginia Bruce, looking for all the world like a gorgeous Follies beauty, plays one of these glorified girls and Jean Chatburn enacts another.

Original Stars Used

Some of Ziegfeld's headlining stars are represented either by themselves or by doubles whose imitations are astoundingly true to their originals. The inimitable Fanny out-Brices herself in a sketch describing her meeting with the great Ziegfeld, which is one of the funniest things Miss Brice has done on or off the stage. Harriet Hocter shines in a beautiful ballet. And Ray Bolger, looking like Freddy Bartholomew come of age, brings the house down with one of his comic solo dances. Eddie Cantor is well represented by Buddy Doyle and A.A. Trimble brings Will Rogers to life by his uncannily true imitation of the cowboy philosopher.

Latter Days Shown

The latter part of the picture, which marks Ziegfeld's meeting with Billie Burke, his marriage to the lovely stage star, his extraordinary comeback, after a series of failures, when he had four hit shows going on Broadway at once, and his death, which came shortly after the stock market crash which wiped him and his shows out, are sentimentalized to the extent that the fabulous Ziegfeld character loses not only its valid appearance, but a good deal of its picturesqueness. Myrna Loy is a beautiful and understanding wife, in the role of Billie Burke. The balance of the huge cast is excellent and the Robert Z. Leonard's direction is a brilliant accomplishment. The producers are to be congratulated on every phase of the beautiful production except their lack of courage when cutting the film.

IMDb: Like some huge, lumbering, Palaeozoic beast with a heart, nothing like this film has existed in a long time and I doubt we will see its like again. It is both interesting and lovable because so historically quaint. Structurally, the narrative takes a chronological approach. However, except for its starting year of 1893 and its ending soon after the 1929 stock market crash, no dates are given - a short-sighted flaw in the screenplay. Despite his success as a showman, Ziggy was constantly plagued with financial problems and embroiled in relations with women. But more interesting to me than the biography are the grandiose production numbers. The film's principal strengths are its humorous script, dazzling sets, glamorous costumes, music, a cameo appearance by Fanny Brice and a great tap dance routine by Ray Bolger. My main complaint is its length. Also, I find it curious that this big budget beast with its theme of wealth and beauty came out right in the middle of the Great Depression. MGM must have been on a colossal ego trip. Overall, *The Great Ziegfeld* is fun and definitely worth watching, especially as a time capsule look back at an entertainment era that is gone forever.

LIBELED LADY (1936)



William Powell (centre) and Myrna Loy reprise their first *Thin Man* outing (of an eventual six - in all, they starred in *fourteen* films together!) with Harlow and Spencer Tracy in an entertaining though overly contrived tale of newspaper skulduggery. Loy, as usual, is a delight, especially with Powell. This brain-in-neutral, soon-forgotten fun-fest wins four Maltin stars. 98 minutes.

IMDb: Timeless entertainment / This movie snaps, crackles and pops / The acting is top of the line. Tracy was great at comedy, Loy is classy, sassy, funny and witty, Powell at the zenith of his game and glowing Harlow steals the show / Powell and Tracy are both in peak form and the film moves like quicksilver. If one line doesn't work, don't worry, another will be along in a few seconds. This and *Bringing Up Baby* are true screwball classics. Worth catching / One of the finest romantic comedies ever filmed / Too clever and complicated at the end - otherwise great / This unsung starry gem offers wit and slapstick wrapped in some gorgeous sets and costumes / William Powell must have loved the year 1936. It was the year he made *The Great Ziegfeld*, which won the Best Picture Oscar, *My Man Godfrey*, for which he was nominated for Best Actor and one of the finest screwball romantic comedies ever made. That would be *Libeled Lady*. Although widely viewed, with good reason, as one of Jean Harlow's best, Powell steals it - not that the rest of the cast are too shabby, either / Simply the best. Right up there with *My Man Godfrey* and the pick of Tracy-Hepburn / The film's real selling point is its clever drawing room dialogue and rat-a-tat-tat delivery. One doesn't see this type of intelligent comedic script come out of Hollywood these days - and watching Loy glow on screen is always magic / The likes of which we'll never see again.

AFTER THE THIN MAN (1936)



Unlike so many sequels, this one - even more delightful than the first and with young James Stewart (second right above) as an added bonus - does not disappoint, even a bit. 108 merry minutes. Don't miss it.

IMDb: Unquestionably Asta's finest hour / While the original *Thin Man* was fresh and new, this one has all the dents and dings banged out of the script, leaving a much better and more interesting film / This *Thin Man*, like the first one, combines a great mystery story with a very real portrayal of the marriage everyone wishes they had / The madcap drinking and razor-sharp banter continue on their merry way, as do Nick and Nora / Loy is wonderfully aloof in a fine comic performance / Laugh out loud funny, but also dark, thrilling and sexy. Powell and Loy and wonderful together / Nick and Nora have to be one of the greatest, if not the greatest on-screen couples in film history. Hepburn and Tracy, Gable and Leigh, even Curtis and Lemmon are better known, but, strong story notwithstanding, what makes this film great is Powell and Loy. Myrna Loy made a career out of being the nonplussed wife or object of affection to varying degrees of spastic leading men. As Nora, a wealthy and beautiful young socialite who married Nick, a detective from the wrong side of the tracks who loves liquor and ribald humour, her straight-faced elegance is perfection. Powell is hilarious and charming as Nick, and they own the characters so thoroughly, I can't imagine anyone else playing them. Much is made of "chemistry" and the chemistry between these two is electric / A hugely entertaining comedic mystery that will keep you guessing and laughing all the way through to the end / Has all of the key *Thin Man* ingredients: a clever whodunit, beautiful photography, exquisite fashions and decor, jokes as dry and plentiful as the martinis, a performance or two of the popular music of the day and an ending that will surprise you. While each of the *Thin Man* films is great fun, this one is the best.

DOUBLE WEDDING (1937)



This seventh Powell-Loy collaboration is up with their very best, which is praise indeed. Jo Swerling's sparkling screenplay, an adaptation of Ferenc Molnar's play (which seems to have been based loosely on *The Taming Of The Shrew*), is delivered with brio and panache - and this despite production of the film having to be halted for six weeks after the sudden and unexpected death of Powell's paramour and Loy's friend Jean Harlow. 87 minutes of unalloyed pleasure - except where were the weddings??

IMDb: I love finding old movies, and this one is buried treasure. Watching it was like looking through a beautiful, whimsical kaleidoscope. So many facets are perfect: Loy at her peak of gorgeous, wry sophistication, the Deco sets, Powell's gentle irony, the relationships of various characters and the consistency of dialogue. Even the physical pranks were great - and I don't like slapstick all that much! / Clearly, this movie is screwball comedy. It has all the elements of the standard definition - the domineering female who challenges the man's virility, the fast and witty dialogue with rejoinders and clever ripostes, the farcical scenes and antics. *Double Wedding* veers off in places, and seems to chop off scenes with poor segue. But these few instances of what might, in any other film, be a distraction or fault fit perfectly with the zaniness of this movie. It's not the best of the screwball films, but it still rates ten stars for laughter. The cast are all outstanding in their roles / Despite the slapstick and some scenes that devolve into a general ruckus, the script is clever. Loy's determined dryness and the scattered non sequiturs are highlights. How smart they were to toy with the chemistry of the successful Powell-Loy team and put them in this different film that still plays to the strengths of each. It's got yumph! / Powell's masterful comedy instincts make this a movie worth savouring / The film starts out strong and then utterly loses itself. Come on, it's *named Double Wedding*, for chrissakes, and yet we got no double wedding. Not even one!

MAN-PROOF (1938)



Myrna plays a romantic novelist's daughter who is all grown up but emotionally stunted. A strong cast - Loy, Franchot Tone (above), Walter Pidgeon, Rosalind Russell and Nana Bryant - do their best and have individually engaging moments but the tale holds about as much interest as a wet sock. 75 minutes.

IMDb: Uneven, with a lot of stilted and silly dialogue / Starts out as a bubbly comedy and quickly sinks into "women's picture" banality. The tone is all over the place - now breezy, now soap-opera - and poor Myrna looks miserable throughout. She must have known how negligible the script was. The four leads are pros and almost always interesting to watch, but this one is so MGM-fake and dramatically underpowered that it plays like a prehistoric episode of *One Life To Live* / Dreadful / Self conscious and overwrought / Unlike her MGM women peers, Myrna Loy went straight from Oriental villainess to vamp to good-time girl to wife and mother. In the process, she rarely got the chance to do the witty, romantic, champagne comedies given to Joan Crawford or Norma Shearer at MGM or even Irene Dunne, Claudette Colbert and Jean Arthur at other studios. Her few attempts, such as this pure dreck, were very lacklustre. If she wasn't portraying Bill Powell's sly wife or Clark Gable's ultra-feminine love interest, it seems the studio didn't know what to do with her / *Man-Proof* is one of those films that the studios ground out week after week. There's nothing particularly special about it unless you count Myrna Loy, who is always special. Not great / *Man-Proof* is more laugh proof than it should be / What I thought would be a nice frothy comedy turned into the proverbial pumpkin. Poor direction, poor rationale and wasted talent / A predictable love triangle in which it's hard to know what's worse, the acting, the plot or the dialogue. Character motivation is also in woefully short supply. Nana Bryant as Loy's mother comes across best / Despite the mixed reviews, I found this film to be well worthwhile. Not perfect, but entertaining / Rosalind Russell's wedding veil is worth a look if you want a chuckle (so too a couple of Myrna's hats).

TEST PILOT (1938)



A strong cast - Gable (above, left), Loy, Spencer Tracy (above, right) and Lionel Barrymore - serve up a hackneyed tale that touches on the burden borne by those close to risk-takers, but at bottom is about nothing worth much caring about, since Gable's character is so irredeemably stupid. Myrna looks the part and Tracy is good, but the material is weak. 119 minutes.

IMDb: A good first 40 minutes, then gets very silly / Gable would do much better the following year - much better indeed / Very well done, with excellent dialogue / Least well-plotted of the Gable-Tracy films / Considering its cast, I expected more - at the very least, some decent acting. The plot was interesting but poorly executed. The internal conflict within Tracy's character is weakly projected. All he ever does is act depressed. Loy and Gable are too often over-dramatic, which becomes a turn-off after a while, especially with such contrived and ridiculous dialogue. Their only entertaining interaction was at the start, when they were flirtatious and coy with each other. Maybe this movie was considered good on release, but it hasn't worn well with time.

Advicetothelovelorn:

Test Pilot is the epitome, if not the apogee, of Old Hollywood excellence, a slick but weighty entertainment with several remarkable facets and the full weight of the MGM dream factory behind it. First, consider its pedigree: its scriptwriters included Howard Hawks and former aviator Frank "Spig" Wead, the personable stars - Clark Gable and Myrna Loy - had just been voted the King and Queen of

Hollywood in the biggest poll of its kind ever conducted, there was a meaty role for dramatic heavyweight Spencer Tracy, about to land his second consecutive Oscar, and the direction came from skilled filmmaker and unequivocal "man's man" Victor Fleming - who specialised in rough, tough pictures, but would shoot most of The Wizard Of Oz and Gone With The Wind the following year. 75 years on, it still looks like what it was: a proper prestige production, shot on location as well as in the studio, and full of impressive flight footage (which I'll acknowledge isn't always perfectly integrated with the close-up work).

Gable is the test pilot of the title, pushing new planes to the limit at risk of his life. Tracy is his fatalistic, constantly gum-chewing mechanic, Loy the university-educated farm girl on whose parents' land he downs, setting up a romance that moves from blissful exploration to bitter desperation, as drunkenness and death intervene. This was among Loy's favourites of all her films, and, she said, the last movie in which her seven-time co-star Gable dared to emote, before the need to protect his macho image rendered him dramatically immobile. He was a formidable star, if not much of an actor, and Test Pilot finds him at the top of his game. Loy herself is out of this world: she was never more affecting or amusing - eliciting bona fide LOLs and heartbreak in equal measure with a rich, multi-layered characterisation brimming with confidence. Usually happy to merely complement her co-star, here she just acts him off the screen. Tracy is also at the peak of his gargantuan powers, exhibiting a wondrous naturalism that's sustained throughout every moment he's on screen, whether centre-stage or not. There are a few extraneous scenes, a couple of lurches in mood and perhaps an overly folksy wrap-up utilising Lionel Barrymore's popular persona, but it's largely a proper movie with proper characters, and little of the superficiality or convolution that marred many of Gable's MGM vehicles. It's also a film of great moments: Loy's first meeting with Gable, her breathtaking heart-to-heart with Tracy, a noted precursor to the classic "Who's Joe?" scene from Hawks' own Only Angels Have Wings and that gutting instant that consists of nothing more than the mechanic tossing some gum on the ground. (Unless my ears deceive me, it's additionally one of the only Breen era movies to contain blasphemy, in the scene where Gable goes to visit Gloria Holden.)

In her book, Loy says the film really stands as an example of what big studio filmmaking could be - and who am I disagree?

(21 October 2013)

TOO HOT TO HANDLE (1938)



This last of seven Gable-Loy screen pairings (discounting 1925 silent *Ben-Hur* in which both appeared, along with Gary Cooper, Joan Crawford and Carole Lombard, as extras) is 107 minutes of loud, brash, tedious nonsense featuring a dull plot and some horribly crass dialogue that even Gable and Loy, on middling form, struggle in vain to rise above. No more to say, beyond leave it.

Une Cinéphile:

I found this film to be excellently acted by everyone, with not one performance over the top or not well done. Gable and Loy together are so fantastic. Loy wrote in her autobiography that she knew how to play against Gable - by always playing to his tough side - and you can clearly see her do so here. Alma is an edgy, fast-talking character but you can see Loy give her a little extra to play against Gable. This was Loy's third time playing a gutsy aviatrix and it never gets old. She was perfect. One of the many reasons why I adore Loy as an actress comes up in this film: Chris and Alma are talking and to play down the rapport between them he tells her the two of them as a newsreel team are pals like the comic strip Mutt and Jeff. Something comes up a few minutes later and Chris says it may be too dangerous for them to do. Alma is not afraid and she perfectly, sarcastically, coldly says to Chris: "What's the matter, Mr. Mutt?"

Lost your nerve?" Just the way she says that line and her expression is acting perfection. When Loy says "nerve" she gives her lip a curl that even if she tried to do it again she probably could not. It was like a real genuine reaction. I really enjoyed Gable also. The last half hour of the film he was so great. The ending is where the film gets silly, but in a good way. I will not give away what happens but I was laughing and it was Gable who was making me laugh. Chris is a character who was not the greatest guy ever. He used people to get a good story - he even used Alma - but I liked him. I guess Gable really did have such charm that you could not help but like him even if he was a jerk. (26 May 2011)

IMDb: Okay, this isn't Shakespeare. Gable and Loy were the number one box office draws of 1938 and it seems that what made them famous was not believability but that their movies were so much fun. Gable pictures were always high on action, romance and fun while Ms. Loy became famous for her wonderful banter in the *Thin Man* films. So, in this case, you merge the two into a very light adventure filled with laughs, some marvellous dialogue and a romance that doesn't always work. It's certainly *not* the best film they did together, but nor is it the worst and it's 100% pure "1930s MGM formula". Modern viewers might not find it so magical - after all, the plot is pretty tough to believe and the characters seem pretty cartoonish. But, given my love for this genre and these actors, I don't mind terribly. Sure, it's not super-memorable, but it was more than worth the energy I spent watching / The characters aren't too convincing or realistic, but since this is a romantic action film, that doesn't really matter. The dialogue is fun and Conway's direction smooth. The most impressive photography is the aerial footage of the burning ship. Overall, a pleasing though not too memorable adventure film / The epitome of the madcap comedy-adventure genre. Maybe a little simplistic for today's taste and certainly far fetched but a good, rip-roaring yarn nonetheless / Gable, Loy, and Walter Pidgeon all act well - kudos too to character actor Walter Connolly who turns in a heck of a performance as Gable's newsreel company boss - but the script is pathetically foolish, and why ever is the Amazon jungle peopled by *African* natives? / The strands of the story are woven uneasily into a mixture of comedy and drama that doesn't always work. Gable has the pivotal role as one of the world's most conniving newsreel photographers. He has one hilarious scene where he's faking an aerial bombing in China, which is Gable at his comedic best. But the script is overly busy in too many directions and the hi-jinks become tiresome before the story is over. Considering the cast, a major disappointment / Absolutely inane / This cast of pros obviously never left the Hollywood back lot, but for the general public who had never travelled very far, this would have been very exciting and exotic. A fun story, worth every minute / Gable, Pidgeon and Loy all are great, although Loy doesn't quite carry off the "missing brother" pathos as well as she does the brave pilot parts / Gable's performance completely dominates and overshadows this movie, even when he's in a chicken suit. You would think that a film with Myrna Loy in the cast would have some great zingers back and forth with the male lead. This happens too few times, however, and Loy looks like she'd sooner not be there. Because much of the satire is still true today, the movie doesn't seem dated. There are some plot holes and only Gable is truly worth watching. There are also a few too many racist references that might make a modern viewer uncomfortable / Unless your a fan of the stars, don't bother.

LUCKY NIGHT (1939)



Robert Taylor (above) and Loy make a charming couple and their tale is told with winning style and good cheer. But it's hard to root for his callow character or buy the spurious Irresponsibility Wins happy ending. 82 minutes of froth.

IMDb: Not a brain teaser, but fun, flirty and wild / *Lucky Night* gets off to a roaring start with Loy and Taylor tearing up the town and obviously having a ball together. There's great chemistry and the situations they get themselves into are a lot of fun to watch. Unfortunately, when the pair sober up the next morning, the story goes off the rails and becomes a dreary, incoherent mess / An unspeakable turkey, almost as bad as it gets - and this from 1939, cinema's best year ever! / Dumb but entertaining / Security v. spontaneity - how do you compromise? This movie sure doesn't tell us. It should have stuck with levity and lunacy. A case of the script failing the stars / Where did the class go in Hollywood? No more greats like Katherine Hepburn or Cary Grant, like Robert Taylor or Myrna Loy. Instead, we are stuck with the likes of George Clooney who, though one of today's best actors, is not in Cary Grant's league / Starts out like gangbusters, like a lost treasure, a fast-paced, deft comedy with wonderful dialogue delivered by two Golden Age stars playing off each other beautifully. Then, suddenly, it stops and gets very serious. Though it picks up again a little toward the end, what a disappointment / Like Tyrone Power, Taylor gets too little credit for his acting because of his amazing looks, but jealous critics (mostly men, probably) failed to notice that, like Power, he had a beautiful, rich speaking voice and loads of charm. Less ambitious and complicated than Power, Taylor took pretty much whatever MGM handed him, including dogs such as this. Still, despite a schizophrenic script, he shows an affinity for comedy and Loy is lovely as the heiress. Both can be seen in better films / A '30s trifle that falls short of the mark / Sub-par / Watchable and smart / Loy is a delight, even when the muddled script makes her appear foolish and downright sappy.

THE RAINS CAME (1939)



This fine film won the first Best Special Effects Oscar ever awarded, which, given that it was up against (nearly) all-conquering *Gone With The Wind*, is good going. From the stylish opening credits, each screen of which is washed clean by teeming rain (see below), you know you're in for something special, and so it proves. We're in Imperial India in 1938, in the fictional state of Ranchipur. Loy plays a snooty English m'lady who has a past with louche ex-pat painter Tom Ransome she makes clear she'd be glad to revisit until smitten by local Brahmin Doctor Safti. The monsoon arrives, followed in short order by a excellently rendered earthquake, floods, fire and disease. In its last third, the film (Myrna's 99th!) runs a little out of steam, resolving into a by-the-numbers weeper. But *lots* of fun along the way. 104 minutes. Recommended.



Kevin's Movie Corner: (1) Loy is exceptionally good here in one of her best roles. Beautifully photographed by Arthur Miller, she rarely looked so beautiful. Edwina is a fundamentally good person who can't resist succumbing to her base instincts in an effort to stave off the stultifying boredom of marriage to a man she despises.

(2) While films like *Lives Of A Bengal Lancer* (1935) and *Gunga Din* (1939) extolled the virtues of British rule, it's interesting to see the critical portrayal of the English here. In a telling exchange, one Englishwoman notes that, with the monsoon season coming, everyone will be leaving Ranchipur. Ransome wryly counters: "Five million people stay behind." The woman, barely batting an eye, says: "The *right* kind of people, I mean."

Myrna Loy on Tyrone Power:

[Tyrone Power] used to invent games for us to play on the set, just to keep my mind off other things. "If you weren't who you are," he asked, "what would you like to be?" "I haven't the slightest idea," I replied. "Do you know what you'd like to be if you weren't Ty?" He made a graceful sweeping gesture with his hands: "I would like to be the wind, so I could be light and free and be anywhere I want at any time. I could go all around the world and look in people's windows and share their joys and sorrows." When he died, that's all I could think of. I said to myself, "Well, all right, he's the wind."

The New York Times on Power: *Tyrone Power's Major Safti suggests none of the intellectual austerity, the strength of character and wisdom of [source novel author] Mr. Bromfield's "Copper Apollo." He is still Mr. Power - young, impetuous and charming, with all the depth of a coat of skin-dye.*

IMDb: A slick soap opera with a fine supporting cast and spectacular special effects. Power, Brent and Loy all do a superior job with sometimes sudsy material and are never less than intriguing / Loy completely captures the world-weary Lady Esketh and her re-discovery of spirit and soul she thought long lost. Her death scene is profound and touching. Power is gorgeous as the "Copper Apollo" who brings Loy to "life". His conflict between loving Loy and the demands of his "duty" to Ranchipur come across clearly in a subtle performance / Myrna Loy is the most gorgeous moribund plague victim on record / Not until *A Passage To India* was filmed in the 1980s was the Raj ever shown in so imperfect a light / Incredible special effects, a solid story, beautiful directing and marvellous acting are the highlights of *The Rains Came*, another movie from that famous film-making year 1939. The only thing I didn't like was that Loy had to pay for her sins (i.e. her slutty behaviour) whereas Brent, of course, did not / The story seems a tad familiar and pretty ordinary. The effects, on the other hand, were good enough to beat out *Gone With The Wind's* amazing burning of Atlanta! / All that a wonderful movie should be / A big, corny Hollywood epic, strengthened by terrific star performances / Great spectacle, weak drama / Soggy story gets a lift from the special effects / Movies do not need to show sex, cursing or intentional violence. Great ones such as this are eloquently written and offered without defilement - so different from most of today's output / A great book becomes a so-so film / A very unusual production for its time, well worth a look / An entertaining winner.

ANOTHER THIN MAN (1939)



More ditzy fun with Nick and Nora, dulled this time by Hammett's confounding aid. The story, true to that author's form, is too complicated by half, making the narrative frustratingly difficult to follow and whodunit speculation impossible, which lessens viewing pleasure. It's probably a fine and ill-defined line between too simple and over-elaborate, but this third *Thin Man* felt less like a spree and more like hard work than the previous two. But alright still. 98 minutes.

IMDb: Easy to forget this was made more than 75 years ago, because the dialogue is sophisticated, the plot complex and the performances wonderfully underplayed / Asta is my favourite movie dog - even better than the one in *Frasier* / This film lacked the originality of the previous ones and the dialogue and wit weren't as sharp. It felt as though it was trying too hard to live up to expectations / Not as good as the first two but still very good. This one was darker in atmosphere but the comedy is still magically woven into the flow. The lead actors' chemistry is as great as ever, though Loy has less dialogue here and fewer good lines / Works on all levels. Worth your time / With the third of the series, the producers decided to move a little more into the world of Hammett and nudge away from the cutesy cute banter. It's only a little, but noticeable with the fairly complex plot / The appeal of the series is in watching the witty banter between Powell and Loy, not the murder mystery plots themselves. *Another Thin Man* has an elaborate plot and drops a boatload of hints along the way, summarised neatly by Nick in the last scene. But all these machinations serve to do is get in the way of giving us what we really paid to see. In short, whodunit? Who cares?

I LOVE YOU AGAIN (1940)



Another decent Powell-Loy comedy, though hampered somewhat by a premise even more daft than usual - in this case, a crook receives a blow on the head in 1931 that turns him into a dull but worthy citizen. In the nine years that follow he establishes himself as a leading light in a small Pennsylvania town, building up a pottery business and getting married to Myrna in the process. Then, while on a cruise on 1940, he receives a second blow on the head that turns him back into the crook he was. Myrna, having been about to divorce the boring old stick, finds herself rather more attracted to her changed man. W. S. Van Dyke directs capably and it's impossible to resist Powell (above). Despite playing yet another sourpuss (see also *Double Wedding* etc), Loy shines too. 99 minutes.

IMDb: Fast paced, very funny and well worth watching, especially for Powell's zany character / If this film doesn't make you laugh, you're dead! / Working with very thin material, Loy and Powell do it again / Powell plays the double personality man with his usual flair and Loy is at her best, showing such beauty and sophistication that it's hard to imagine anyone else playing Kay / The pairing of Powell and Loy is magical. She looks particularly beautiful here and her confusion regarding her changed husband and sadness over her marriage is quite touching. Recommended / Powell gets clunked and so do we, having to watch this nonsense. Bring back those *Thin Man* mysteries. Asta, too / Brilliant and a lot of fun. Not wacky *Love Crazy* fun, but more sophisticated and deliberately paced. A wonderful old film with excellent acting, writing (aside from the dumb plot device) and direction. One of Powell and Loy's best / Mildly amusing / Not one of their better efforts, though their charm and chemistry make it worthwhile.

THIRD FINGER, LEFT HAND (1940)



Loy plays a magazine editor who invents a husband in order to deter suitors, only to be put on the spot when one of them sees through her ruse and turns up at the family home claiming to be said husband. Takes a long while to get to where it was clearly headed all along, but the journey is pleasant enough and production standards are impressively high. 95 minutes. Nice.

IMDb: Notable for its too rarely seen dignified Black role, played by Ernest Whitman / Loy and Melvyn Douglas (above, left) are fantastic. My only quibble is that the film is a wee bit too long for its material / I feel it my civic duty to warn the viewing public off this wordy, boring, actionless, painful and overlong movie that I deserve an award for seeing through to the end. Watching was torture! / Not exactly a side-splitter. A film with good intentions that go slightly awry ... Loy gives it the old college try and never disgraces herself (although she didn't manage to hide her heavyset ankles in this one, making it clear why she would never be considered a pin-up, despite a face that always lit up the screen) ... Better than mediocre, less than scintillating / Loy is funny and her Brooklyn accent sequence at Niagara Falls is comedy at its best. Yet the movie is too predictable / Refreshing, sweet and almost new / A cute comedy, nothing special / Fun to watch because of Loy and Douglas, though not a masterpiece by any means / A delightful and slightly saucy romantic trifle with a somewhat unique plot [actually very similar to 1945 Stanwyck vehicle *Christmas In Connecticut*, with both scripts from the pen of Lionel Houser]. It's easy to forget what a fine actor Melvyn Douglas was, and although I usually think of him in dramatic parts, he could be pretty crisp in comedies too. And Myrna Loy rarely disappoints. Recommended / Interesting title and top-name talent, including Myrna Loy and Melvyn Douglas, but what an utterly inane script. This could have been such a great story about a woman who needs a man to pretend to be her husband ... but instead we get all this hooey / The preacher has the best line: "Two by two we marry, one by one we die."

LOVE CRAZY (1941)



Powell and Loy on top form again in a solid, well-constructed farce that barely puts a foot wrong through 99 fun-filled minutes. A tour-de-force from Bill (above) who gets to act nuts (for love) and in drag (as his own sister), with strong support from Myrna *et al.* Low? Black? Blue? *Love Crazy*.

IMDb: A Myrna-Bill comedy. What's not to love? / A surprisingly little known gem that's sure to tickle your funny bone - if you have one / There are genuinely funny moments - I didn't want to take my eyes off Powell and Loy for a second during the first half. The last act, however, really gets ridiculous / Plenty of comedic punch, but it did tend to run on a bit toward the end, especially the drag business / Powell comes through with some truly memorable moments and Myrna is just so Myrna! / A really stupid plot, executed wonderfully / An absolute scream, highly recommended / This screwball comedy is so screwy that it rapidly becomes strained. The plot machinations are contrived and do not arise naturally from the characters. There are a few funny moments, but the inspiration is thin throughout / Of film history's many comedy teams, I truly like Powell and Loy the best. Their perfect rhythm isn't real life, but the way real life should be. Possibly it's their brand of humour and certainly the writing makes a difference, but Powell is such a consummate comedian when given any kind of chance and Loy is so brilliant at being funny, intelligent, independent and genuinely loving all at once. *Love Crazy* is the one of their best pair-ups. Myrna has a bit less to do, but it would not be worth seeing without her. The supporting cast is sometimes clichéd, but are perfect at it. If you like feeling good, watching excellent performances and having a few belly laughs to boot, don't miss this one / Zany pre-war fare at its near-best, and proof positive that there was more to Powell and Loy than dry martinis and a cuddly dog / Legally and medically dubious but comically tops / You'll like this movie.

SHADOW OF THE THIN MAN (1941)



Fourth in the series just about maintains the standard (though the second takes some matching) with a tale concerning murder in and around a team of gambling racketeers. Nick sorts it out in his usual urbane style, with a little help along the way from Nora and Asta, of course. 93 minutes. Fun.

IMDb: May be the funniest in the *Thin Man* series. Like the others, it features a good mystery with plenty of quirky characters and plot twists. While the story may not be as clever as the original, it makes up for it with the humour. The restaurant scene is a classic! / While the humour is terrific and the plot serviceable, many of the supporting characters are so one-dimensional and clichéd. I think this was more a function of the writing and direction than the supporting actors. Donna Reed, for example, is given little to do except to stand by and act helpless. The lawyer of one of the suspects does nothing at all but get in the way. I still enjoyed this movie and would rate it somewhere in the middle of the *Thin Man* series - neither the best or the worst / Powell and Loy are terrific, as always, and Donna Reed is beautiful in an early role, but Sam Levine as police Lt. Abrams steals the show / Of the five *Thin Man* movies I've seen, this is the worst / Nothing really new but still fun / Fine professional acting from both Powell and Loy / There's something of a miracle at work here involving amazing characters, some of the very best in movieland. By this film, we're familiar with the setup: the dog, the booze, the prodding wife and the fact that Nick knows everyone in town. Nonetheless, [director] Van Dyke - nearing his suicide - falls off his usually crisp rhythm. The dialogue lacks the snap of the original / The murder mystery is interesting, but like all the *Thin Man* movies, the style, repartee and humour are what make Nick and Nora fun and keep them popular, even today. And their little dog too.

THE THIN MAN GOES HOME (1945)



Powell (above) is good in anything, Loy makes an irresistible Nora and the pair bounce off each other like cue ball and red. There's some nice stuff here, too - especially a game Loy being put through her jitterbug paces - and the familiar formula is followed (more or less, though the action moves from city to town and, in deference to wartime austerity, there's far less drinking and smoking). But be prepared, also, for excess padding - the story takes half an hour to start - another dense, difficult plot and a replacement Asta that, while cute, can't match the original's extraordinary scene-stealing talent. 96 minutes.

IMDb: Some of the magic is beginning to fade. The story line meanders a bit and is not as energetic as the previous instalments - but still a fun movie / In films these days, if the plot runs thin, the director warms up some pixels and amps up the special effects. Back in the day, when the plot got thin, there weren't a lot of optical effects, so the director leaned on the writer and actors for some great dialogue and snappy acting. This *Thin Man* has a plot as thin as a 1940s projection screen. As long as Nick, Nora, Asta and the supporting cast are up for the fun and mayhem, though, plot doesn't seem to matter so much. The last reel drags in comparison to the rest, but there are some great scenes and snappy jokes throughout. And where do sailors learn to dance like that?!? / A solidly entertaining effort, though a clear step behind the first two outings / This fifth film of the *Thin Man* series was the first made without director Woody Van Dyke, who committed suicide after being diagnosed with terminal cancer. When World War II started, Myrna Loy, unlike any other female star in Hollywood, shelved her career in favour of working with the Red Cross and other civilian agencies. This film was the only one she made between Pearl Harbor to V.E. Day / Hilarious!

SO GOES MY LOVE (aka A Genius In The Family) (1946)



This well turned out and consistently engaging slice-of-life starts in 1867 when young Myrna moves from Boston to Brooklyn to hook a wealthy spouse. But, though the prospects come flocking, love takes a hand and she falls instead for impoverished inventor-next-door Don Ameche (above). If this was remade today with Michelle Pfeiffer and Guy Pierce, you'd hardly notice the difference, so close the resemblance in both cases. The only mystery is how Myrna can produce a healthy baby without first having even the smallest bump. Solid if conservative filmmaking that opts (see below) for fiction over fact. 88 minutes.

IMDb: A good time-passer, not bad though not spectacular. Probably worth watching just for the interesting old sets / More biopic than comedy, *So Goes My Love* is based on Hiram Percy Maxim's memoir *A Genius in the Family*. The film attempts, rather poorly, to explore the comedic aspects of Hiram Percy's relationship with his father, Hiram Steven Maxim. Taken by itself, it's a rather superficial film about the man who revolutionised the machine gun by inventing a version that harnesses the power of the bullets' expelled gases. Maxim's accomplishments are hardly mentioned - the narrative focuses rather on the fictionalised relationship between him, his wife and their son. The younger Maxim, by the way, founded the American Radio Relay League, the national organisation of radio hams / A highly amusing if episodic 80 minutes of entertainment with Loy and Ameche on top form / It's a pity the movie didn't cover the latter part of British-born Maxim's life - the machine gun, a fortune, a Knighthood, amusement rides, a second wife and charges of bigamy would have made a more fascinating tale / A ton of fun / Likeable leads in an obscure gem / An expensively mounted romantic family comedy in which Loy is sexy, charming and beautiful, despite the use of overly heavy make-up throughout / A lovely film that will leave you with a smile on your face.

THE BEST YEARS OF OUR LIVES (1946)



The Best Years Of Our Lives looks dispassionately at the problems facing ex-servicemen seeking to pick up the threads of civilian life after returning from war. Loy has named it her favourite film and Al's homecoming (above) her favourite scene. In 1946, its theme of rehabilitation could hardly have been more timely, giving it potent social significance. But, while worthy, it's a mite dull, although ends very movingly. Loy's part, though a relatively minor one, is played with her usual sincerity and grace - yet, having seen several of her films, it's hard not to conclude that, in contrast to someone like Barbara Stanwyck, she never seemed to extend or challenge herself - to step outside her comfort zone. Did she actively seek a certain type of "safe" role or was she the helpless victim of typecasting? Who can say? At the 1947 Academy Awards, *The Best Years Of Our Lives* won seven Oscars, including Best Picture, Best Director (William Wyler), Best Actor (Frederic March) and Best Supporting Actor (double amputee Harold Russell). 163 minutes. Good.

An IMDb opinion: This is undeniably a well-made movie, particularly by post-WWII standards, but today it is strictly a period piece, replete with large doses of heavy handed moralising. Nearly all of the plot lines are utterly predictable and many scenes are embarrassingly saccharine and / or hackneyed. On top of everything else, at nearly three hours, it's an excruciatingly long, boring slog. Possibly over the years people have been reluctant to criticise the movie for fear of being accused of being insensitive to veterans. I can't think of many other reasons for its absurdly high IMDb rating.

And a response: We all come here with different experiences, philosophy and learned attitudes about life and it's futile to try and convince someone that their reaction to a film or play is "wrong", so I won't do that. Yet I must respond to the above views. The poster says that the film is rife with "heavy-handed moralising". So it is, which, I find appropriate in a film "about" moral convictions (something virtually AWOL in most films made today). I *don't* see the "heavy-handed" presentation the poster does, however. Perhaps, today, *any* story which assumes a "moral truth" (or truths) about a culture's identity may seem heavy-handed *automatically*, especially considering that American culture today seems hopelessly unsure about *any* moral truth remaining within its increasingly morally ambiguous social fabric. The poster says the "plot lines are predictable". The film's narrative is a simple one dealing with the "normal people" of an era doing "normal things" and reacting, more or less, "normally" to things that have been done to them. Refreshing today, I think. I suppose, therefore, that *The Best Years Of Our Lives* must plead guilty to a measure of "predictability". But, then again, the picture is, to a large extent, about the predictability, *as well as* the moral precepts, abiding in normal people during the time the film is set. No aliens, no car crashes, no wizards, no race issues, no homosexuality issues, etc. For some, that must make for an "excruciatingly long and boring" production. I venture to guess the poster is a deal younger than me. He says, the film is "embarrassingly saccharine and / or hackneyed". Well, it *is* sentimental. Of course, sentimentality is no less a human condition than are cynicism, scepticism, a tendency toward literalism, etc., and worthy of inclusion in a drama *provided* the sentimentality is "honest". If this film's sentimentality was not honest, the tears it brings to my eyes, and others', would not, I trust, come forth as readily as they do. I think *The Best Years Of Our Lives* is the best American motion picture ever made. But it takes all kinds to make a world.

Roger Ebert (excerpt): *The Best Years Of Our Lives* doesn't use verbal or technical pyrotechnics. It trusts entirely in the strength of its story. One of the sources of its power is the performance by Harold Russell, the handless veteran. Producer Samuel Goldwyn was actually criticized at the time for his "tasteless" use of Russell, but look at the heartbreaking scene where Homer invites Wilma (Cathy O'Donnell) up to his bedroom - not to make a pass, but to show her what is involved in getting ready for bed. He thinks maybe then she'll understand why he doesn't think he can marry her. Russell was an untrained actor, but utterly sincere. He says: "This is when I know I'm helpless. My hands are down there on the bed. I can't put them on again without calling to somebody for help. I can't smoke a cigarette or read a book. If that door should blow shut, I can't open it and get out of this room. I'm as dependent as a baby that doesn't know how to get anything except to cry for it." We *know* Russell is speaking for himself, and the emotional power is overwhelming. O'Donnell's response is pitch-perfect. Russell won an honorary Oscar, "for bringing hope and courage to his fellow veterans through his appearance." Although he was actually nominated for best supporting actor, the Academy board voted the special award because they thought he didn't have a chance of winning. They were wrong. He won the Oscar, the only time an actor has been given two Oscars for the same role. The film also won for best picture, actor (March), director, screenplay, editing and score. As long as we have wars and returning veterans, some of them wounded, *The Best Years Of Our Lives* will not be dated. Incidentally, the film is said to have inspired one of Sam Goldwyn's famous Goldwynisms: "I don't care if the film doesn't make a nickel. I just want every man, woman and child in America to see it."

THE BACHELOR AND THE BOBBY-SOXER (aka The Bachelor Knight) (1947)



Fun story about 17 year old Shirley Temple (above, left) getting a crush on Cary Grant, a footloose artist twice her age. In the course of scheming to get her over it, elder sister Loy, a judge, falls for him herself. The worst thing about this film - best of the three Grant-Loy pairings - is its title. 95 minutes. Good.

IMDb: An all-star cast deliver the Academy Award-winning Best Original Screenplay of 1947 / Nothing terribly original but a pleasant diversion. Grant is entertaining as always and Loy fits the judge role nicely. Hard to believe that this movie, in which Shirley Temple plays a high schooler, was actually toward the tail end of her film career. What a waste that we didn't see more of her later / The only problem with the film, given its great cast and very funny script, is that the comedic element triumphs at the expense of the romantic. There aren't half as many scenes between Grant and Loy as I would have liked, and although Loy is convincing in her portrayal of Margaret - you really *do* believe that her character has fallen for Grant's - it certainly isn't with the help of the script. The film really belongs to Grant and Temple, who both get to show off their comic talents to great effect. While Loy makes an excellent straight woman, it is a shame that we didn't get to see more of her, or more of her character interacting with Grant's. All in all, great fun, laughs and cast - but romance? Well, that would probably have to come from another film / Loy does wonders with her role as Judge Turner, Grant brings his natural elegance to the part of Richard Nugent - just watch him in the picnic competition - and Temple is a sweet Susan, the girl infatuated with Dickie. In minor roles, Rudy Vallee and Ray Collins are perfectly cast / One of Grant's best comic roles, and Loy is excellent. Temple absolutely shines as the wilful yet innocent little sister full of romantic dreams of an older man, and steals quite a few of the laughs. If you fancy a light-hearted caper, this truly delightful film is for you!

SONG OF THE THIN MAN (1947)



In which Nick and Nora bow out with another decent effort, all over in a brisk 83 minutes. In their thirteenth film together, Powell (above, right) and Loy bounce as easily and productively off each other as racket and ball. Myrna states in *Being And Becoming* that she only agreed to make this film on condition that it would be Nick and Nora's swan song, so the decision to wind up the series was at least partly hers. Fans of the them or it will not be disappointed. Nick's cryptic reference to Somerset Maugham alludes to 1946 film *The Razor's Edge*, a screen adaptation of the author's novel of the same name. Nick Junior is played by eleven year old Dean Stockwell. Now in his sixtieth year as a screen actor, with more than 200 credits to his name (*Song Of The Thin Man* was his tenth), he's one of a select few to turn juvenile casting success into a lifelong career.

Last but not least of the mystery-comedy series, Song Of The Thin Man from 1947 belongs among the best of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's six-film franchise, ranking just behind The Thin Man and its first sequel, After The Thin Man. With its tightly constructed mystery and witty repartee standing as some of the best in the series, this sixth entry of "mirth and murder" disproves the theory that sequels only get worse as they go on and distinguishes itself through a unique setting and social climate for the picture, specifically a New York gambling boat and jazz subculture. Although William Powell and Myrna Loy look much

older than their fresh-faced appearances in 1934's original, they're no less endearing or comically adept as Nick and Nora Charles, cinema's most gentlemanly detective and his affectionately inquisitive wife, while their boy Nick Jr. (Dean Stockwell) has become a chip off the old block, and the Charles' pup Asta is still as sprightly (yet cowardly) as ever. Albeit an unofficial goodbye, the series could've hardly asked for a finer send-off.



[Powell, Loy, Keenan Wynn and Clinton Sundberg](#)

*MGM's wheels were spinning for another Thin Man film after 1945, when the fifth entry *The Thin Man Goes Home* was released and delivered another financial success for the franchise. Reception of Part 5 wasn't as strong as previous entries, and so the studio approached an all-new producer to take over. Nat Perrin, who penned (often uncredited) gags and conceived story ideas for the Marx Brothers from 1931 onward, was asked to produce. Perrin also co-wrote with Steve Fisher from a story by Stanley Roberts, all of them far removed from original author Dashiell Hammett or the series' initial husband-and-wife screenwriters, the Hacketts. As producer, Perrin wanted to appeal to modern audiences and drop Nick and Nora into the fashionable bebop era; he consulted jazz pianist Harry "The Hipster" Gibson to understand the proposed subculture. Gibson would provide the basis for Clarence "Clinker" Krause (Keenan Wynn), the jive-talking hepcat who accompanies Nick and Nora on their investigation into beatnik territory. However modern and distinct the*

backdrop from the other Thin Man films, it would also unintentionally emphasise how un-modern and out of place Nick and Nora were in such a setting.

To direct, Perrin chose Edward Buzzell, having worked with Buzzell from a distance on minor Marx Brothers efforts like At The Circus (1939) and Go West (1940). Buzzell's closest film to a Thin Man film was Fast Company (1938), a mystery-comedy about a husband and wife (Melvyn Douglas and Florence Rice) rare bookseller team who investigate the theft of stolen books and become entangled in a murder mystery. Under Buzzell and Perrin, Song Of The Thin Man would go on to make profits for MGM, but along with their Tarzan series, the studio resolved to end while they were ahead. In her autobiography Being And Becoming, Loy had much to say about the film. "[It was] a lacklustre finish to a great series. I hated it. The characters had lost their sparkle for Bill and me," she admitted, though this isn't evidenced onscreen. "The people who knew what it was all about were no longer involved. Woody Van Dyke was dead. Dashiell Hammett and Hunt Stromberg had gone elsewhere. The Hacketts were writing other things." Concerning the film's favourable reception, Loy wrote: "According to the Hollywood Reporter, 'Most of the cricks gave a cordial welcome to old-timers Bill Powell and Myrna Loy.' I know that only because Bill sent me the article with 'old-timers' circled in pencil and this note scrawled at the top of the page: 'Dear old girl! I know you wouldn't want to miss this! Love, Willy (old boy).' Loy's feelings about Song Of The Thin Man were shared by many, but the film has aged well and, when measured up against its immediate three predecessors, contains an immediacy the others lack.

The film opens on posh gambling boat S.S. Fortune. Nick and Nora are introduced as a pair of Nick's less reputable friends make eyes at Nora from behind. "Woo-who!" one of them says. Nick replies: "In polite society, it's not 'Woo-who' - it's pronounced 'Woo-whom'." When we first see them, Powell and Loy have aged much since The Thin Man Goes Home. Powell is a little wide around the midsection and there are crow's feet in the corners of Loy's eyes, but he's still debonair and she's as beautiful as ever. In past Thin Man films, the writers saw Nick Jr. as a nuisance and included the character only because they couldn't ignore him (then again, that's just what The Thin Man Goes Home did) after the Hacketts saddled the Charleses with a child. Song Of The Thin Man makes the most of the character in a hilarious, if somewhat cartoonish sequence over breakfast. Nick Jr. demonstrates that his father's streetwise wiliness has rubbed off, referring to a woman as a "broad" and then later shirking his studies to go play. Nick is begrudgingly forced to reprimand the boy with a spanking, but with Nick Jr. over his knee, Nick hesitates and daydreams, remembering fond father-son bonding moments in a dream-bubble over young Nick's bottom. As Nora looks on disappointedly, all at once

Nick recalls when he fell off a bike and Nick Jr. laughed at him - and then proceeds to enthusiastically correct the boy with a newspaper, only to discover Nick Jr. has padded himself with a baseball glove. "That was very clever of you," Nora concedes approvingly. As parents, the carefree Nick and Nora find themselves apologising to their son for their late nights out and gallivanting about town, but when Nick Jr. is believed in danger, the hour-long train ride home shows the parents in desperation.

*Song Of The Thin Man's story structure allows the usual Thin Man formula to play out naturally. Rather than call the usual suspects to an enclosed room for a grand finale, Nick arranges for everyone to gather on the S.S. Fortune again - an equally condensed space - where our hero solves the whodunit by pulling the strings of paranoid characters. Nora has her moment of resourcefulness too when, earlier in the film, she slips away to interview the key witness, Buddy, who's gone barmy in a sanatorium. She finds herself alone with a madman. Taylor's manic-eyed performance as Buddy, and Grahame's turn as the resident femme fatale (before her roles in *The Big Heat* and *In A Lonely Place*) decked out in a sleek gold-lame dress, become two of the film's most interesting performances. Still, the graceful charm of Powell and Loy remind us why they're the screen's most venerable, most sophisticated duo. Any detractors accusing Powell and Loy of not having their hearts in their performances aren't watching closely enough. At the time of the film's release, Powell and Loy were doing some of their best screen work, Powell in *Life With Father* (1947) and Loy in *The Best Years Of Our Lives* (1946), and their talent isn't wasted here.*

*Despite the danger of making Nick and Nora look outdated when compared to the contemporary jazz underground, today it's evident that *Song Of The Thin Man* looks on with comic misgiving and instead aligns with our enduring married couple. In one sequence at a late-night jam, Nick and Nora pose as hipsters amid a smoky, bopping party of musicians and jazz aficionados. Though they clearly don't belong, the camera moves from the Charleses, across a room of gyrating musicians, to a familiar bust resting on a piano - it's Beethoven, holding his signature scowl, seemingly aching over the organised aural chaos around him. Indeed, jazz culture itself is suspect, while Nick and Nora are their hallmark selves, as delightful and timeless as Astaire and Rogers, Bogart and Bacall and Tracy and Hepburn. William Powell and Myrna Loy would make one more film together, the forgettable *The Senator Was Indiscreet*, also from 1947, but *Song Of The Thin Man* would sing a more appropriate farewell. Once the murder is solved, Nick says "Now Nick Charles is going to retire." Nora asks, "You're through with crime?" "No," says Nick. "I'm going to bed."*

Brian Eggert, 24 May 2014

MR. BLANDINGS BUILDS HIS DREAM HOUSE (1948)



This inconsequential comedy takes 20 minutes to establish that the Blandings' NYC apartment is too small for them and doesn't get any more interesting (or amusing) after that. Old hands Grant (above, right) and Loy play commendably, but in a piece so uninvolving that it's hard to care. 94 tedious minutes.

IMDb: Pleasant entertainment / Not "screwball" or "madcap" but witty and intelligent / I hate to quibble over movies like this that don't try very hard to be anything other than light comedy, but I wish there was more Grant and Loy and less Melvyn Douglas (above, centre). I like him well enough, but anything that keeps the other two from trading banter is just taking up space. This also includes the first ten minutes, with its quotidian silence and very, very, very low-intensity humour / This classic movie feels more manufactured than others of this period / Good old fashioned comedy without the cursing and gratuitous sex / Slick and perfectly paced. One for the whole family / Bland bland bland. *Mr. Blandings* never takes off. There's a bunch of ideas but none is pushed so far as to arouse more than some condescending smiles. Everyone does his job but to no avail. The script is poor and directing ineffectual, which you feel from the very first scenes. A minor, thoroughly forgettable, family comedy / A light and airy film showcasing how life should be / A fantastic showcase for Grant's bewildered man of America, a part he always played so well / The script has a perfect ear, the director's timing is impeccable, and the sophisticated style of the stars gives the entire production a polished sheen. Grant, Loy and Douglas are all brilliant, but this is much more than a star vehicle. It's one of the best sophisticated comedies Hollywood ever committed to celluloid. And 66 years on, the story is all too true / Grant had the knack of making the wildest situations seem believable at the time, and even somewhat sophisticated. Loy's charm and elegance complement him well / Frivolous entertainment at its best / A real disappointment. The only thing that makes *Mr. Blandings* worth seeing is the short segment near the beginning that brilliantly satirises life in the Big Apple / There are very few old movies I dislike, but this one just doesn't work for me / Far better than godawful '80s remake *The Money Pit* / Myrna choosing her colours is a hoot!

CHEAPER BY THE DOZEN (1950)



Set in 1921 and based on the true story of the Gilbreth family of Mom, Pop and twelve kids. The trouble is, it's not a very interesting story. The above image tells you just about all you need to know. Tepid and tame. 82 minutes. Miss.

IMDb: A warm, heartfelt family movie / Can you imagine anyone who would time himself to see if it was faster to button his vest from top to bottom or *vice versa*? A funny and engaging family movie well worth your time / Fine entertainment the old fashioned way / The cutesy family humour is artificial and contrived. I find the whole bunch - the gratingly cheerful yet overbearing dad, the annoyingly precocious children - unsympathetic. Myrna Loy as the long-suffering Mom is the only character I would want to spend any time with. Clifton Webb does as well as he can with what he is given, but the acting skills of Jeanne Crain as the rebellious eldest daughter don't rise above high-school drama club level. The whole family are cardboard cut-outs, not real characters. A measure of the film's failure at involving this viewer is how unmoved I felt at Dad's sudden death / While some see this movie as "overly cheerful and sappy", I find it and similar movies of that time a haven from today's sexualised, blow 'em up trash. Pure entertainment. You don't have to think. Just sit back, laugh and enjoy / Ideally cast, with fine actors Webb and Loy. You couldn't ask for better to present this material - but the film's message is nothing to write home about and the whole thing is not very memorable / No blood and guts, no explicit sex scenes and no foul language. A classic! / If I were to be kidnapped by terrorists, making me watch this movie again would be more effective than any other form of torture they could devise / Stolid throughout with lame humour and, in places, decidedly reactionary / Very dated, boring and not funny in the least / Annoying and saccharine by turns / Warmly amusing.

BELLES ON THEIR TOES (1952)



This *Cheaper By The Dozen* sequel serves up more of the same "feel-good" froth. With Pop gone, Loy gets more screen time and carries the picture ably enough - but still there's precious little to get excited about. Hoagy Carmichael (who also played Butch in *The Best Years Of Our Lives*) is a pleasant surprise, but not enough of one to sell this damp squib. 86 minutes. Miss #2.

IMDb: It is graduation day for the youngest of the Gilbreth children and, sitting in the crowd, mother Lillian is moved to reflect back on times, on a reduced income, when things were not so rosy for her family. And so this film-long flashback begins, although it didn't help my interest in the material to find that these "harder times" were a sort of Norman Rockwell version of poverty rather than what most people would consider the real thing - they have a butler, for goodness sake. So I wasn't surprised to find that this film had less interest in producing an actual character drama than in churning out a cheerful melodrama with basic family morals and the Americana virtues of the 1950s writ large across every scene. I'm not sure this world ever did exist but, regardless, I'm sure that some viewers will find such nostalgia reason enough to justify watching the film. God knows there is not much else to bother spending time on. Its humour is very basic, involving harmless pratfalls and good ol' wholesome joshing - shame there are so few laughs to be had. The cast aren't much cop either. Loy buzzes round full of worry, love and strength while the cast of children are more about quantity than quality. Turns from Hunter, Arnold (above, left), Carmichael and others provide some distraction but this is not the type of film where anyone is given enough good material to put in a strong performance. Overall, then, a fairly basic comedy melodrama with a patina of chocolate box nostalgia that some might find appealing, but with little else to commend it / Good clean fun is never out of style / It hurts me to put down any film starring the great Myrna Loy, but this is disappointing ... Vastly inferior to *Cheaper* ... / Nostalgia is nice but the charm wears thin when the film offers nothing new and you have to settle for more of the same / Not as much fun as the first film, but acceptable enough.

MIDNIGHT LACE (1960)



Loy takes the supporting role of Aunt Bea in this sub-sub-Hitchcock "thriller" that provides Doris Day with an opportunity to prove she can act (she does okay) and the audience a long 104 minutes to wonder why it bothered. The plot's mystery element - about the only interest here - is not presented even-handedly, with last minute revelations thrown in to fill holes and compensate for poor direction. Compared to *Dial M For Murder* or *Sorry, Wrong Number* this is slight and unsatisfying. For Day dreamers and Loy lovers only.

IMDb: The most entertaining part of watching this pitiful *Dial M For Murder* pastiche was associating characters and situations from *Dial M* with their counterparts in this one: Tony Preston - the creepy husband, superficially solicitous but in reality anything but, with money troubles and a rich wife. Mrs Preston - the blonde American wife in London, whose husband married her for her money. The inspector - well, what can you say ... The phone - a vital element of the villain's plot, but eventually part of his downfall. Rex Harrison and Myrna Loy act everyone else under the table. However, Doris Day is no Grace Kelly and is totally unconvincing. Her "breakdown" scene that some reviewers are raving about, is laughable, straight out of a sixth-form school production. Calling it "over the top" is being kind to it. To sum up: if you want to laugh at a complete misfire that takes itself very seriously, this is for you. Otherwise ... / One of 1960's biggest box office hits and for the life of me, I have never understood why. Day's performance here is strictly a matter of taste. This is the kind of role that Lana Turner could play in her sleep, but Day is out of her element - though Loy is fun / Newly-wed Kit Preston (Doris Day) is tormented by a tape recorded voice that threatens to kill her. Can the voice carry through its threat? Every sane person who watches this film will sincerely hope so. Day - over the top, terrible - single-handedly ruins the film, though a stupid story with gaping plot holes and a meaningless title don't help / Derivative and mildly entertaining but not without merit / Silly fun / This, one of Doris Day's rarer dramatic outings, goes to show why she mostly did comedies / For a suspenseful film with great stars and real class, you couldn't do better.

AIRPORT 1975 (1974)



Though disaster-themed films have always been a Hollywood staple - think *King Kong* (1933), *The Last Days Of Pompeii* (1935), *San Francisco* (1936) *et al.* - their golden age began in 1970 with the release of *Airport*. Its success at the box office paved the way for *The Poseidon Adventure* in 1972 followed by *The Towering Inferno*, *Earthquake* and *Airport 1975*, all in 1974. (Two more in the *Airport* franchise would appear before the decade's end, by which point the genre was ripe for the spoofing it so memorably received in 1980's *Airplane!*) *Airport 1975* is a by-the-numbers nail-biter featuring Helen Reddy as a singing nun, Gloria Swanson (playing herself) in her last screen role and her first feature film in eighteen years and Myrna Loy, eleventh on the cast list, in a seat-filling bit-part as an aging souse that any one of a hundred actresses could have taken. Oh, Myrna - has it really come to this? 106 minutes.

IMDb: The best and funniest of the *Airport* series / Processed trash, only for the few who like to see a bunch of old stars thrown together for commercial profit. Gripping in parts and the special effects are great but the stars are as bored as the viewers / The worst, duller disaster movie ever made / A disaster movie in which nothing really happens / Most of the lines go to Charlton Heston at his teeth-gritting worst. Full marks to Karen Black for keeping a straight face / Not one of the best disaster films but one of the most entertaining! / Loy has an occasional gleam in her eye when working with Caesar - shame they couldn't give her a decent line or two / Worst of all is watching the great comedian Sid Caesar and the great actress Myrna Loy reduced to picking up pay checks as pathetic, sleazy caricatures who matter not one iota to film or plot. They could have blown out of the cockpit hole along with the cabin crew and no one would have noticed. Is that any way to treat two legends? / Oh, those 1974 outfits and hairdos! A guilty pleasure / Worth watching if you're in the right mood, but check your brain at the door / Myrna Loy is good - actually, she really shines in this crowd / Watching Myrna order a boilermaker is funny? What's the point?

IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE (TV: GENERAL ELECTRIC THEATER, 3.28, 3 April 1955)



Broadcast on 3 April 1955 and running just 24 minutes, episode 28 of General Electric Theater's third season was *It Gives Me Great Pleasure*, starring Myrna Loy as Kate Kennedy, an itinerant lecturer who talks on, and suffers, loneliness. She wants out of her contract, but her unscrupulous agent keeps persuading her to carry on with her 76-city tour. Though there's plenty of plot for the allotted time, the story is brought to a morally dubious and very unsatisfactory conclusion. Production standard is good, though, as is Myrna herself in an undemanding part. She appeared in three GET episodes all told (the other two in 1957), playing a different character each time.

IMDb: This episode of *GE True Theater* has a rather impressive cast which includes Myrna Loy, Zachary Scott and Robert Preston. Loy is the star - a widow and mother of two who makes her living on the lecture circuit. However, the life is getting to her as she's so often on the road and barely gets to see her kids. Again and again, she threatens to quit but the slick agent (in the sort of role Zachary Scott could do best) is always able to manipulate her into sticking with her gruelling schedule. Is she finally going to be able to quit and be with her kids or will it remain business as usual? I don't want to say more about the plot - it might spoil it.

It Gives Me Great Pleasure is quite nice - light in mood with a few comic moments, making it suitable for all the family. Not brilliant, but with enough plus points to repay half an hour of your time.

WHAT'S MY LINE? (TV, CBS Network, circa September 1960)



Award-winning panel game show *What's My Line?* ran in the United States on the CBS Television Network from 1950 to 1967, followed by subsequent revivals through to 1975, making it the longest-running U.S. primetime network game show. Moderated by John Charles Daly (above), a panel of four - regulars Dorothy Kilgallen, Arlene Francis and Bennett Cerf plus a guest (in this instance actor Dirk Bogarde) - are challenged to determine a contestant's occupation (or celebrity's name) by asking questions in turn. If they can do so before receiving ten "no" answers, they are deemed to have won, otherwise the contestant wins. Participating members of the public received a cash prize of up to \$50 (for ten "noes" i.e. \$5 per "no"). By the look of the flip-card above, celebrity guests in 1960 received a household appliance made by show sponsor Sunbeam. Before a celebrity guest appeared, the panel would put on blindfolds. Most such guests came from the world of entertainment and would usually attempt to conceal their identity with a disguised voice - Loy here assumes a Southern accent. The panel could often determine their identity early, as they knew who was in town, or which major movies or plays were about to open. (In Loy's case, the panel swiftly named *From The Terrace*, her then-current film.) On those occasions, to provide the audience an opportunity to see the guest play the game, the cast would typically allow questioning to pass around at least once before guessing correctly. (True again - they pegged Loy quickly but spun the questions out a little. Even so, she was on and off the stage within four minutes.) Full show running time: 26 minutes.

ETUDE IN BLACK (TV: *COLUMBO*, 2.1, 1972)



Judging by its roster of guest star cameos, someone in *Columbo*'s production team - probably Peter Falk (above) himself - must have been a big fan of classic Hollywood. Ray Milland and Ida Lupino both appear twice, then there's Janet Leigh, Rod Steiger, Don Ameche, Anne Baxter, Will Geer, Dick Van Dyke, Sal Mineo - and, in Series Two opener *Etude In Black* (starring and co-directed by Falk's close friend John Cassavetes and also featuring the first appearance of "Dog" the basset hound), the 67-and-still-got-it Myrna Loy. Her part is small and her character not integral to the plot or its resolution, but lovely to see her anyway. It's clear from scanning the episode's reviews on IMDb that many fans will have watched it wholly unaware of Loy's presence or past. Such is fame. The caravan moves on. But some remember. 96 minutes.

IMDb: This episode gave me a chance to see some actors I've seen in movies and on TV before. I recognised the name of John Cassavetes from the opening credits. I first saw him in an episode of *Rawhide*. Another actor I recognised was *Thin Man* wife Myrna Loy. That voice caught my attention even before I saw her face. And then *Columbo* met the butler who turned out to be Mr. Miyagi from *The Karate Kid*, so this was a good episode for me both for the familiar faces and because I got to see more Myrna than I thought I would / It's nice to see Myrna Loy show up as Danner's mother, though she does little with her minor role / The movie also features Myrna Loy, a big star from the silent era (!!)/ *Etude In Black* features the brilliant Myrna Loy as Cassavettes' mother-in-law and she is not only just perfect in the role but also still beautiful after all these years / Far from note-perfect. The scene with Loy and the fogies is badly played / One of my favourite *Columbos*, thanks to its top-notch cast.

DAY AT NIGHT (TV: PBS, 23 May 1973)



Day At Night was a 1973-4 PBS (public service television) series featuring 130 one-on-one interviews with notable cultural and political figures by host James Day (1918-2008). Episodes were recorded in New York City, where Myrna was then living. She was one of the programme's first guests. Day's interviewing skills are poor, but Loy suffers his frequent interruptions with dignity and poise. Running time: 28 minutes. Here's a brief taster:

Q: There came a point, I gather, when playing Nora Charles did begin to pall?

A: I never had any problem, except that the last two were not as good, I don't think. Francis Goodrich did the first three. We always had great writers ...

Q: In the early days you played Oriental femmes fatales - as a matter of fact, that is where the name Loy came from ...

A: No, that is not where Loy came from. My name was Williams - is Williams - and I didn't want to change it, but they were threatening me with things like Myrna Leesa and I thought, no, that's not good, so some young man who belonged to an avant garde group at the time came up with this and I rather liked it - not too much - and put it on the back of some photographs and sent them to Warner Brothers and next thing I knew I had a contract with them and that was my name. And it's been a lovely name. I just found out the other

day what it means. It's a Thai name. It means to float. In Thailand every year they have a festival ... in which they send little boats out into those ponds, canals, and they put candles and flowers on them and they sing and they send them away. Isn't that a lovely way to get rid of your sin?

Globalman (YT, early 2015): Thank you for posting this. I was friends with Myrna from 1960 until her death. I was only fourteen when we met. My mother was her agent at MCA. It was New Year's Day and my uncle went to pick Myrna up during a blizzard. But Myrna could not be daunted by a blizzard. She made a date and wouldn't let anything stop her from coming to dinner. She was like that. She loved my mother because they were in some ways alike and so she treated my mother like a daughter. I of course was expecting a glorious and glamorous star dressed like a queen and there she stood in grey wool trousers, pullover and boots and that beautiful red hair and green eyes. I fell in love with her. She was one of the most important people in my life. Less than one year later we moved to 63rd Street just opposite to where Myrna lived. My mother was often working late or out of town on business and I would have dinner with Myrna nearly every week. She had a cook twice a week and that is when she would entertain. We never spoke of her films or early career. Myrna lived totally in the present. I was too reserved to broach the subject of her glory days in Hollywood. We had been friends about five years when suddenly she began speaking of her films. And as I got older I had more courage to ask questions. We had many good conversations. She always gave me books for birthdays, Christmas etc. She attended my graduation in Central Park from the School of Art and Design. In those days people were more discreet but if someone would come up to her she was always kind and gracious. After I moved to Los Angeles 1966 whenever she was out there for work or interviews I would go to her hotel and we would go to one of many exclusive restaurants for dinner. Once I picked her up in my VW Beetle. Everyone in the crowd and restaurant recognised her. A few people came to the table asking for autographs which she gave graciously. When we left I remember standing there as Rolls-Royces, Cadillacs, Jaguars, etc were brought by the parking valets and then came my VW. I remember feeling a bit unhappy as all these people watched and I could hear whispers of "That's Myrna Loy." But Myrna simply stepped into my little auto as if it were a gold coach. By the early '70s I would go pick her up and bring her to my flat where I had cooked dinner. We'd spend the afternoon and evening chatting and laughing. As I write I realise how fortunate I was and how much I miss her. She understood me like no one else and had tremendous patience and always good words of wisdom. I have felt heartened by some of the comments below. It is true there are no more people like her or like Cary Grant, also a good friend. They moved quietly and discreetly through life using their wealth and celebrity to make a better world. Myrna gave me political and social consciousness which has followed me throughout my life. I know she would despair of what has happened in and to America. Of course if there had been more people like her America wouldn't have fallen into the mess it is in. I am grateful to see things like this online because many people have already forgotten Myrna which is to be expected, I guess, but this way she lives on for new generations to discover. I can promise you that Myrna was one of the most down to earth and no nonsense people I've ever known in my life. Wherever you are, dear Myrna, I send you all my love and will hold you in my heart to the end of my life.